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A BROKEN FAITH.

VOL. III.

A BROKEN FAITH

BY

IZA DUFFUS HARDY

AUTHOR OF

“GLENCAIRN,” “ONLY A LOVE STORY,”
&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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A BROKEN FAITH.

CHAPTER I.

FOR HER SAKE.

Till all men see
What love can do for Love—Love strengthen me !

.
That I may walk uprightly and not fall—
Fall not nor stumble, though the way be long,
Led by thy hand and in thy strength made strong.

Now by the joy that was and grief that is,
By every sacred unforbidden kiss,
By all the bitterness of unshed tears,
Help me to bear the burthen of the years—
Give me fresh courage and sustain my soul !

P. B. MARSTON.

THE clock on the mantelpiece of the
little Paris *salon* is ticking away the
minutes ; it keeps as correct time as a highly-

ornamented timepiece, with a gilt forest supporting it, and by way of appropriate adornment a gilt Actæon chasing a gilt Diana over the top of it, can be expected to do. But to Athelyn time seems to stand still; the minute hand is slower than the hour hand should be; the space during which it crawls from figure to figure is a year.

Nothing seems moving but her heart, and that is pulsing so fast she can hardly breathe; her whole being seems tense and wound up to breaking strain as she waits and wonders—"Will he come?" He will not break his promise surely. But if he does—if he should change his resolve—if that hastily-given word should fail to draw him here, then the chance of speaking to him the words that fill her heart will be lost to her for ever, for she can seek him no more. And if she waits in vain for him

this day—if he leaves this her last request unheeded, and flings his own promise aside, then it seems to her that life will be over for her! She wonders vaguely—will Death be merciful enough to come and save her from the horrors of suspense that will close round her if Harold does not come?

But he keeps his word; he comes to her at last. She hears the well-known step at the door, and as she rises up to meet him her breast heaves with a great sigh of unutterable relief. What has to come will be pain enough; but any active suffering is light compared to the misery of helpless suspense, than which even hopelessness is less hard to endure.

She is not now the marble woman who faced him that morning in the galleries of the Louvre; her heart is fluttering with mingled relief and misgiving; a feverish flush is burning on her cheek; her eyes are darkly

gleaming as the changeful light of a stormy sky; her lips are apart and she is panting slightly as she struggles for composure of breath and collectedness of tone.

They meet without a greeting, without a touch of hands, they who parted but a few months before this day with clinging arms and blinding tears and long, long kisses. It is one of the commonest chapters in the history of Love, so common we forget to see "the pity of it!"

"Well, Athelyn, I am here."

"Yes," she answers, somewhat faintly, gathering her energies together. "I am glad that you have come."

"You wished to see me, you said?"

"I did. You were surprised of course at my asking you. But—I could not help it."

"And now that I am here, what have you to say to me?"

He does not speak ungently ; but there is always a suggestion of sternness in Harold's look and tone when he is not smiling ; and at this moment smiles are very far from his lips.

She is calm and composed now ; but it is hard to find words to answer him. Perhaps he misinterprets her silence.

"Tell me, Athelyn," he says, with incisive coldness, "have you sent for me to reproach me?"

"No, not for that. I know well that reproaches would be wasted words."

She speaks with unutterable sadness ; he seems so far apart from her ! The whole wide world of land and sea,—nay, Death itself, could not divide them more utterly than they stand divided now.

"You are right," he assents. "What's done cannot be undone."

"No, it cannot be undone ! But, some

wrongs are not altogether irreparable!" She looks at him in half-timid anxious appeal, and he at her in perplexed questioning. "It is hard to say," she continues, rather pleadingly than hesitatingly. "I do not wish to reproach you. I only—only wish to ask one thing. You say, and truly, that things done cannot be undone. But, if you could undo this—would you?"

"Perhaps I would," he slowly admits. "But it is too late to talk of these things now," he adds, half impatiently.

The sense of immeasurable distance between them seems to be softening a little; and it is in a freer, fuller tone that she rejoins to him.

"Not too late! Oh, Harold, never too late! For this is not irreparable! This step *can* be retrieved—this wrong *can* be set right. You know that you can do it—and you only."

“What do you mean?”

“You—you are—free to marry, are you not?”

“Yes.”

“Then you can——” She has come nearer to him, stands breathless with a sudden passion of appeal. “You can,” she says, pantingly, “and, Harold, *will* you not?”

“I! *Marry* her, you mean? Athelyn, are you mad?”

“No, not mad, only in earnest with all my heart and soul. Does what I am asking sound so very wild?”

“So wild that, if it were not from *you*,” he begins, with the darkened brow she knows so well. Then he checks himself, and changes his phrase and tone in the old abrupt way. “Athelyn,” he says, with a not unkind impatience, “why do you talk to me of this at all? It is no matter for *you* to mix in. I told you, always, that

you were too pure and good for me. But do me the justice to remember that all in my life that was not worthy of you I kept always rigorously out of your sight. I revered your absolute innocence from first to last, and shall do so to the end. How *this* has come to your knowledge I do not know; but through whosoever's indiscretion you have learnt it, it is sorely against my will that such a matter has been forced upon your thoughts. You don't know the world, child—I never wished you to know it. Leave the background of my life alone; it's no place for your eyes to be seeking into."

"Of your life," she repeats. "But it is not *your* life alone that is concerned here. And if—if you have exalted *me* in your mind at the expense of others—if, while leaving me on a pedestal, you have trampled down into the mire other lives that might

have been as pure as mine—if the fate that—that *she* must suffer is one you do not like *me* even to hear or speak of—then the more reason that I—I to whom you have brought only strength and comfort, strength even in sorrow, comfort even in parting—should plead for her !”

“It is like you,” he says, with a sort of reluctant admiration.

“And you will let me ask this of you?” she urges, pleadingly. “Whoever else you would not listen to, if you never, never listen to me more, let me speak this once ! And yet—what can I say ?” she added, simply, painfully. “I am silenced—hedged in all round by what I must not say. Oh ! what is there on earth I would not give to have a *right* to ask—an influence to exert. I have no right—no influence—no claim—none ! But, Harold, think—think ! I dare not put it to you plainly, for you would

think I was reproaching you, and I am not indeed. But think, just once, of her as she was only last year—as she *is!* shrinking from my eyes, *mine*, to-day—and still more as she will be when the inevitable reaction comes. And you, and you only, can lift her up. You must have—loved”—her voice falters on the word—“her a little, surely? and she has loved you well enough to lose herself for you! If faithless *for* you, she will be true *to* you—I would even pledge myself for her truth. For she loves you. Perhaps it is as well we parted—you and I; perhaps you were right about *me*—I was not fit for you—too weak and spoilt a child; and it is well that you stand free now—free to right her if you will. She who has lost all for you, not now for the first time—I know all—she has loved and will love you always. Oh, Harold! you who have marred, will you not mend?”

She has pressed both hands on her heart ; its throbbing seems to stifle her ; her voice is broken under the fervour of her appeal ; her pale face is upraised prayerfully to his. He looks at her fixedly—almost too fixedly and coldly to be really quite unmoved.

“And if one day,” he says, slowly, “I should win name and fame and wealth, would *you* on that day like to see another woman by my side, bound to me by an indissoluble bond?”

“As things are, *yes*.”

“And yet, Athelyn, I used to think you loved me?”

Harold Parkhurst is an admirable specimen of the type of man who will never lose the chance of putting the woman who loves him to a cruel test ; let him only have the weapon in his hand, and he will stab ; it is as if he deemed the omission of inflicting a wound a wasted chance.

"I loved you !" she owns, lifting higher her beautiful proud head—"yes, so well that, if it were not to right a wrong that is otherwise irreparable, I would rather have died than seen another woman your wife ! but, as it is"—her voice changes into a passionate pathos—"as it is, I have only one wish on earth—that you should marry *her* and be kind to her, and never see me more !"

"Is this a woman's love?—if so, none ever loved me before !"

Her breast heaves, otherwise she is as still as marble.

"Do you doubt that I love you?" she says, in a deep, untrembling tone, with no blush warming the deadly whiteness of her cheek ; her eyes are dilated till they seem all black, and lose all expression in their blank intensity.

"No, I—fear—you do," he answers, slowly.

His face is rather stern than tender ; when he suffers most, he is always furthest from melting.

“Then won’t you—won’t you do this thing for me?”

“You ask a great deal,” he says, coldly ; “do you know *what* you are asking?”

Athelyn knows his nature too well to shrink away vanquished *now*.

“Would I ask it, do you think,” she pleads, passionately, “if by any effort—by any sacrifice of my own *I* could retrieve her from this fall and wash the stain away—if only *I* could take the responsibility—if only by any suffering *I* could atone—do you think there’s a trial on earth from which I would shrink ? But only you can do it—only you !” In the eagerness of her appeal she stretches out her hands, clasps his as closely as in the dear, dead days. “I knew her so well—I cared for her so much !

And you—and *you*,” she goes on, brokenly—
“to think that it should be *you*! Oh, on
my soul this lies like fire—it burns—I can-
not tear myself away from it! And I am
helpless—helpless to atone to her; I have
only one wish, one prayer, one thought
filling all my life, and you can set that
prayer at rest. Do you not know that
there is not in all this world a sacrifice I
would not make for *you*? If I could buy
your happiness with my life, I would! For
any sin of yours I would suffer; for happi-
ness to you yield all my own. I would
strike a bargain with Fate and give my very
soul for yours. And will you not, Harold,
grant this one—this only—this last grace to
me?”

She strains his hands in hers with uncon-
scious vehemence; her beautiful eyes burn
into his, all passionate prayer, love, and
yearning and despair all melted and lost in

the one fire of entreaty. She who could never have stooped to beseeching for herself, even were more than life at stake, pours out her soul in one wild pleading to him to atone for his own sin, and redeem Cressida from the ruin he has brought on her.

He looks down on her face, and his dark cheek changes colour at last.

“Athelyn,” he says, irrelevantly, in a tone of suppressed passion, “if ever you love another man, keep him out of my way, or I shall kill him!”

“Don’t think of *me*!” she pleads, with quivering lips. “Only, Harold—Harold!”

In that last almost sobbing utterance of his name she has come to the end of her powers; in that last anguish of entreaty her prayer is done.

“If I do this at your request—” he says, and stops.

“Well?”

He gazes at her with eyes that even more piercingly than of old penetrate into the depths of her soul. Stirred and storm-shaken as that soul is, it is crystal clear still to the very innermost depths.

“You have conquered me, Athelyn,” he says, drawing a deep breath; “you have done with me what I thought no woman could ever do; you have broken my will.”

She takes her hands from his, and buries her face in them, and for a minute or more there is silence; then with a long sigh she murmurs, “Thank God!”

Now that the battle is fought and over, her strength seems to fail her suddenly. The tense nerves relax; her brain swims; her limbs give way beneath her; and she sinks into a chair trembling all over.

“You are over-wrought,” he says, coming to her side and bending over her in the old tender way. “What is it? Are you ill?”

"No—no—it's nothing. I am—almost happy now," she says, with a pale and lovely smile.

Harold turns away abruptly and walks to the window.

She tries to steady her shaken nerves, and calm her physical agitation. It is only physical, for mentally she is not agitated now. She feels as if, after tossing on a stormy sea, she had touched shore again. But the shore is a desert waste. In this supreme effort she has triumphed, and left joy behind.

"Harold," she calls him softly.

He turns at her summons, and comes back to her side, his brows knit, but no ungente look on his face.

"You have promised?"

"I will not break my word. You wish me to leave you now?"

She looks up at him dumbly, with wistful,

mournful eyes; and then involuntarily her little trembling hand goes out to meet his.

He takes it, and just touches it with his lips as though it were a shrine.

"Good-bye," she breathes. "I trust your word."

"Good-bye!"

She hears a step and voice she knows in the courtyard.

"Some one is coming!" she says, looking up. "I had rather he did not find you here with me. Go by *that* door."

"*He!* Is it a lover?" he says, pausing at the door.

"A lover!" she echoes, scornfully, the colour coming back to her cheek. "Harold, do you *know* me? Good-bye!"

"Forgive me," he says, gently. And with that last word—"Forgive me!" they part.

He has left her and the door has closed

behind him before Paul Severne enters from the other corridor.

He is thoughtful and absorbed, and does not notice anything strange in Athelyn's look as she meets him.

"I think I am on the track at last," he says. "They are in Paris. You made me promise to tell you, Athelyn, so I have come. But——"

"But you do not see why I wished to know? or what good my knowing could do? Come here, Paul, and I'll tell you. It is good of you to bring the news to me. You have not seen him yet?"

"Not yet."

"I have."

"You have? You have seen him!"

"Yes! And all that you had to say and do, Paul, is said and done. He will amend the wrong he has wrought—he will marry her!"

CHAPTER II.

“THIS IS MY ANSWER.”

There is nothing to remember in me,
 Nothing I ever said with a grace,
 Nothing I did that you cared to see,
 Nothing I was that deserves a place
 In your mind, now I leave you, set you free !
 ROBERT BROWNING.

From Cressida Lane to Athelyn Hastings.

“ I WONDER will you read a letter from me now ? It is the last of me, and it is so hard to write, it only comes to say good-bye. I sent you no message before—I couldn’t. And now I am gone away never to see you or *him*, or any of you, any

more. I needn't tell him to forget me; he'll forget me fast enough. But *you*—don't think of me nor trouble for me. He will be enough for you to think of. Now that I am gone—*gone*—there's nothing between you and him. For you love him—I know that now. Oh, God! if I had only known it before! It might have saved me—if I had only known. Oh! Athelyn, why did you never tell me a word? I never knew—were you not *sure* I never knew?—till I saw your face in the Louvre—and then I found a letter that he had written to you. I tore it up in little pieces and send you this instead. I know what you did or tried to do for me—he has kept the letter of his promise to you, and this is my answer to it.

“He says he will come back to me to-morrow; he will come back and find me gone. I leave him, for he would leave me

some day—*me* he would never keep true to—but *you*—perhaps to you—God knows! Think what you will of me—and don't try to find me, for I am gone out of your life and his for ever.

“There's one whose name I dare not write, and there's no message I dare send. My last letter told him all. Do you remember that day by the sea? I was happy that day with you. There's a wider sea between us two now. I look at you across it and say Farewell!

“CRESSIDA LANE.”

From Athelyn Hastings to Harold Parkhurst.

“*Immediate.*—I have just received a letter from C. that alarms me. Can it be true that on some wild impulse she has left you? Pray let me know at once. If she has really gone, for Heaven's sake follow her; find her; ascertain if she has gone to her

friends. *Has* she any friends to go to? What could she do alone in a foreign land? Let me know what has happened. I cannot rest till I am assured she is safe. She gives me no address, else I would not trouble you. But only you can influence her, I fear; as only you perhaps can trace her, so to you I *must* appeal. I send this to the club address on your card on the chance of its reaching you, not knowing where you are.

“A. H.”

“Who is there?” said Athelyn, rousing with a start from a trance of painful pondering, after the above letter had been written and sent.

“*Mademoiselle, c’est ce monsieur !*”

Her heart leapt and her colour changed. Could Harold have come to bring her the news himself? Only for a minute she

stood in fluttering suspense ; then her heart sank down as she saw it was Paul who entered.

“ Paul,” she said, with a pale grave face, “ I have no good news.”

“ What is it ?” Then as she hesitated, he added, “ My mind misgave me, you were too trustful—too ready to believe. What has he done ?”

“ It is not his fault !” she said, quickly. “ He has not gone back from his promise. But—I have a strange letter from her—I fear that she— See, you may read it.”

Paul took the letter and read it steadily through. He had thrown himself into a chair and was leaning his head on his hand, as he followed the lines intently, dwelling on every word. Yet still after he had scanned the last line he kept the letter in his hand, his eyes fixed on it in absolute silence.

“Well?” said Athelyn, anxiously at last.

At her voice he slightly started, as if he had forgotten she was there, and seeming to wake up suddenly from deep abstraction, he turned quickly back to the first page.

“No address!”

“No. If there had been, I should have sent straight to her.”

“When did this come? What have you done?”

“I—I have written to him to tell him he must let me know at once if she has really gone. And that we must find her.”

“Where is he then?”

“I don’t know; you see she says ‘he will come back to-morrow.’ I have only a club address. Paul! *this* is not his doing! who could foresee it?”

“Not his doing? You hold him exempt because he has offered to keep the letter of his promise to you? In what words, in

what tone, has he kept it to *her*? Look at her letter again; read between the lines—and you'll see."

She drew nearer to his side; together they bent over Cressida's tremulously written words of farewell, and pondered them once more.

In silence, as they dwelt on them, a perception and comprehension of the story dawned and deepened in both their minds. And though the story in detail they never knew, nor ever saw full daylight shed upon Cressida's motive in this act, yet the insight that they caught more clearly now than ever, into her nature and all its wild and undisciplined overmastering impulses of good and ill, led them towards the understanding of the truth.

Dimly and vaguely at first, more and more clearly when they reflected on it in after-days, they perceived how through all

her madness for Harold Parkhurst must have run the bitter consciousness that she was but a season's romance to him—how, in yielding again to the blighting breath of his influence, she must have known in her heart that he who had wrecked her life for the gratification of a brief spell of summer madness before would inevitably tire of her again—how, even when for his sake she flung herself from the safe harbour of Paul's true love and loyal faith back into those bitter seas whose surface shimmers with the phosphorescence of decay and whose depths are despair, it was with the sure foreboding that some day his frail love would fail her and leave her to sink.

Yet on the impulse of re-awakened passion, that she had deemed dead while it only slept, or turned to hatred while it only wore a mask of bitterness, she had followed at his call. The cup of the old

sweet poison was offered to her, and knowing it was poison, she thirsted for the old time sweetness, and set her lips to it—and so was lost. From such a cup, once at the lips, one cannot turn until the dregs are drained. Quickly—how quickly she reached those bitter lees! Then, when already the reckless whim that had swayed him had begun to pass, when already she shrank from reading in his careless eyes the cooling of his shallow fancy, Athelyn had come before them, like a vision from a heaven out of which *she* was for ever barred.

It was at Athelyn's intercession he had offered to do her the late justice of rewarding her mad love—it was under Athelyn's influence only, and for her sake, not for the unhappy girl who had sinned and suffered for him; *she* might despair and die, but at Athelyn's entreaty he would stoop to save

her. And Athelyn loved him ! and *he*—if it was not Love that moved him when he spoke of Athelyn, in words too cool for real indifference—words belied by the letter she had intercepted and read and torn, then he had never loved, would never love on earth.

The memory of Athelyn and their bright, brief friendship had clung to Cressida always—a sweet and stinging memory it had been of late, from which she recoiled and which she cherished. She had never thought that in marring her own life she was marring Athelyn’s too. And pride was not dead in Cressida, in spite of all. Now outraged pride and tortured love, and burning sense of contrast, and unendurable memories assailed her together and drove her half-maddened to this last and wildest impulse of her flight.

Glimmerings of all this broke upon Paul

and Athelyn as their eyes traced together her parting words.

His face was bent down from the light ; she could not see how deadly pale it was as he muttered, in a changed voice,

“ God help her ! ”

In her heart Athelyn echoed that prayer, but added even more earnestly,

“ God forgive *him* ! ”

Mrs. Hastings, Paul, and Athelyn held a quiet council with shut doors and gravely lowered voices upon the question of what was to be done. In all their minds lurked one terrible fear that no one breathed to the other, but that each knew was weighing on the other's soul. They spoke no word of the Seine or of the Morgue, and shut that worst possibility out of their discussion. Mrs. Hastings' one idea was to advertise in *Gali-*

gnani and the *Times*. Athelyn seemed to shrink from the publicity of even the most discreetly-framed advertisement; moreover, she thought it utterly useless and hopeless, and was for waiting until they heard from Harold. Paul's openly-proposed first move was to seek Harold Parkhurst and ascertain from him precisely under what circumstances she had gone, what she had taken with her, what acquaintances she had in Paris, and so on.

Athelyn could not deny the importance of all such details, nor that Harold was the only source whence to obtain them; she knew indeed that without such information as they might expect from him their search must be a hopeless one; but in her heart she fervently prayed that the two men might not meet, and reflected with relief that, although Cressida had said “he will

come back," she had neither mentioned where he had gone nor where he was to return to her.

That was a trying time to Athelyn. Visions of drowned women dragged out of the Seine, of dripping golden hair and a pallid cold face she knew too well, haunted her both sleeping and waking. Even more poignant than this dread was her anxiety for Harold's sake if this dreadful "worst" should happen. She pictured him as devoured by remorse—and in the picturing suffered far more herself than he would have done under the circumstances which she feared. And more than ever now she dreaded a collision between him and Paul.

Her dread, however, was groundless, her anxiety wasted. No fair-haired English girl was dragged up from the river at that time; and before Paul could ascertain the whereabouts of the enemy who yet could

give him the information he wanted and with whom presumably only on that account he sought an interview, Athelyn received the following letter :—

“MY DEAR ATHELYN,

“It is true that C. has disappeared, leaving no sign. I have made inquiries in vain. In accordance with your desire, I am off immediately for Dieppe, where I fancy it is just within the verge of possibility I may obtain a clue. Should I find any light upon this unaccountable affair, you may depend on my letting you know.

“Write to me—Poste-restante, Dieppe. You remember it is at your request I undertake this search. The madness of a woman’s motives are past a man’s finding out. But *your* wishes I obey.

“Yours, as ever,

“HAROLD PARKHURST.”

Athelyn, in reporting this letter to Paul, suppressed the mention of Dieppe ; and had the relief of seeing him speedily depart for London, that being, as he conceived, the likeliest place wherein to find traces of the missing one.

She wrote briefly to Harold, begging him not to cease from making all possible inquiries, a certain forced coldness and distance struggling with her earnest anxiety on Cressida's behalf in the tone of her letter.

There was silence for awhile ; then two more communications, curt as telegrams, were exchanged between them.

From him.

"There is no news. I give up the search ; it is in vain. Have you anything to say to me ?

"H. P."

From her.

“Nothing—but good-bye.

“A. H.”

These were the last words of that volume
of their lives.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE DECK OF THE ARGO.

Though the seasons of man, full of losses,
 Make empty the years full of youth,
 If but one thing be constant in crosses,
 Change lays not her hand upon truth.
 Hopes die, and their tombs are for token
 That the grief as the joy of them ends
 Ere Time that breaks all men has broken
 The faith between friends.

SWINBURNE.

THE steamer *Argo* is loading in the docks, whence she will sail at day-break. A tall crane, with much squeaking and groaning, as if it found its task arduous, is swinging great bales on board—fat, woolly bales that hang helplessly like over-grown prize sheep by the middle from

its iron beak, until, with a parting squeal, it lets them fall into the open mouth of the hold. A great heap of baggage is piled up on the quay, and another on the deck, the former dwindling and the latter increasing, as the blue-jackets haul and heave and pull the boxes and cases of all sorts and sizes across the gangway.

A little further on, apart from all this bustle, there is a plank laid for passengers to walk on board. On this part of the deck, which is scrubbed until it is as clean as new paint, as an attention to the coming passengers, Mrs. Hastings, Athelyn, and Paul Severne are standing, the two former having come to see the latter off on his voyage to Australia—at least, as daybreak, when the *Argo* will actually start, would be an inconvenient time for them to see the last of him, they have made up their minds that they will at least see him on board.

Mrs. Hastings is nervous, and suspicious of trap-doors; to her imagination the deck of a large steamer is full of pitfalls and secret springs as the stage during a Christmas pantomime; she fancies every moment that an unwary step will let her down into the lower regions where the stokers reign. At first she will not let Athelyn out of her sight, and insists on keeping her close at her side while they go down and inspect the cabins, from the close atmosphere of which they emerge gladly into the air and light of day again, Mrs. Hastings with her nose buried in an Eau-de-Cologne drenched handkerchief.

Presently, being re-assured by the stewardess as to the safe and substantial quality of the deck timbers, and the improbability of the vessel giving a sudden lurch, she enters into a conversation with that important functionary, and ceases to keep an appre-

hensive glance upon her daughter's movements. She becomes interested in the stewardess's descriptions of life at sea, although she congratulates herself mentally that the gods have allotted her life on land.

"I expect as the company will be coming soon," the stewardess says, in a cheerful business tone, as if she were attending at some evening entertainment. "We have very nice society generally, ma'am; last voyage we had a baronet's lady, who used to sing beautiful in the evenings."

These items of gossip are not very interesting to Paul and Athelyn, who saunter away to the further side of the deck and lean over the bulwarks.

It is very quiet there; the deck is almost deserted; the sluggish water scarcely splashes the sides of the vessel. They look up at the forest of masts, the tallest of which dwarf the adjacent chimney-pots into insignifi-

cance; they look away across the water to the tangle of shipping in the distance. They do not look often in each other's faces, and for two dear friends parting—perhaps for ever—they seem to have singularly little to say to each other.

Athelyn is heavy-hearted that day. She has known Paul all her life; and she is so sad on all accounts, now that his departure falls as an additional burden on her weighed-down spirits.

“I'm very sorry you are going, Paul,” she says at last, softly, looking down over the bulwarks at the turbid, sluggish ripples.

“I am sorry to leave some friends on this side of the water,” he rejoins. “But that is all I regret.”

“We have been good friends always, haven't we?” she continues.

“I trust so. Once—lately—we have been ranged on opposite sides; but I think

it has made no difference in our friendship."

He speaks quietly and kindly, yet half interrogatively.

"Not on opposite sides!" she protests, looking up quickly. "Our wishes were never opposed, Paul; my one desire was the same as yours."

"Yet in spirit we were divided. But you have not felt any bitterness against me, have you, Athelyn?"

"*None*; never—never!" she answers, with earnest emphasis, and adds anxiously, "Nor you, Paul, against me?"

"How could I? You would not have been woman had you felt otherwise. You are a woman, and felt and acted as one—yes, and as a noble woman, too. You are true; you are brave of soul! I think, Athelyn, I leave in you the truest and the noblest woman I ever knew."

"I am glad," she says, looking at him

with grave soft eyes. "And I am glad too that we have spoken so, just once, at last. I had feared lest perhaps you—might have dreamt there was some difference between us. But now we part friends as ever, Paul?"

"As ever. Nay, better friends than ever, for now I *know* the nature in you that before I only hoped and believed."

His hand is resting on the bulwarks. With the old frank friendliness she glides hers into it, gratefully, sympathetically. There is no one near them to misinterpret the action. For a few moments they stand without speaking. Then Athelyn says, dreamily,

"And this is the voyage—the voyage we talked of so often—that you are really starting on now. And I am to come to see you on board, as I used to say I should."

Paul is silent. He remembers even better

than she how often they two had talked with Cressida of this coming voyage, the voyage they then dreamt that Cressida would share, how often she had said, clinging to Athelyn's hand, "Dear, you must come on board and see the last of us before we sail!" Paul can talk by the hour together when he has a doctrine to defend or to attack. But on these memories he is dumb. Yet Athelyn knows that his silence is not repellent.

"This is the end of all our dreams," she says, in a soft subdued voice. "We are all scattered—far apart. And for us, who once thought that a world of land and sea could not divide us, there is no re-union—none."

"No," he agrees, resolutely. "No re-union more on earth." He pauses awhile, and then says suddenly, earnestly, "Athelyn! if ever a word is heard of her, if ever your path crosses hers again, remember—I

charge you this one thing by our friendship—that I—forgive; and that I do not forget. Wherever I am, a letter from you will reach me; however far I may be, I am never beyond recall, if I am wanted here. Sometimes I think that I have given up the search too soon. And if a day comes that she needs help—and I am far away——”

“If ever I find her,” Athelyn says, steadily, “trust me! Paul, you *may*. Think how doubly, trebly pledged I am to do my very best for her—now and ever; not for your sake only—not only for hers, but by every influence that has had power over my life, I am bound—I am bound.”

Paul regards her questioningly.

“If not for me and not for her—what influence then, outside your own true heart, can move you now?” he says.

“Oh, do you not understand?” she answers, even more earnestly than she has

spoken yet, and almost as if she were pleading with him to comprehend. "For you, for her I would do much, but still more——" She breaks off and looks away down the river, and adds in a lower, deeper tone, "I have no defence, no excuse to offer for him—*none*! But all the more for that, where he has sinned, and he will not or cannot expiate, *I* long to atone a hundredfold more than if the sin were mine! And this—and *this*—I feel it on my soul; it calls on *me*! Oh, trust me, Paul, if ever I can help her!"

He looks at her with half sad, half affectionate appreciation.

"Strange how from *some* influences good can spring!" he says. "On some grounds the seeds of tares are scattered in vain; only the good grain will grow there. I think, Athelyn, that your heart is one of those grounds."

"You trust me then, Paul?"

"Yes."

"And I you. It's well there's somebody left to trust," she adds, with a repressed sigh; "it shows us the powers of faith are not dead in us."

"Not dead, and *must not* die! Though it seems now that Fate has done badly for us, it has not done the worst while it leaves us the power of doing our best; and you will do that, Athelyn, I know."

She looks up with a grateful smile that ends in a regretful sigh. Parting from Paul—Paul who trusts her—Paul whose influence over her has always been for good, is no light trial.

"I shall miss you, Paul," she says. "Our lives, though on widely different tracks, have run so parallel till now, and here they divide; you go out into the world to work

and act, and I back home to wait, and watch, and dream of action. Do you think my part is the least hard?"

"No," he answers; "I would not change! Work is the one great tonic; the passive is the hardest part to play, and to play well."

The time is passing rapidly; the sun is hurrying faster and faster down to hide himself in the ruddy haze of the west that is reddening and reaching higher and higher up the sky to meet him.

Two or three more people are coming' on board; there is a busier stir on deck, a confusion of voices chattering.

Still Paul and Athelyn stand together apart from the rest; they have fallen into silence as the time that must separate them comes nearer, nearer on swift feet. Athelyn lifts her dreaming, far-away gazing eyes to his.

“After this hour, Paul, we shall all be drifted so far apart! Is all the story ended now, and here?” she says, slowly.

“I think no story ever ends,” he answers. “Every human life is coloured and moulded by all the influences that have once touched it. Each story that once stirs the deeps of our souls is of Eternity, not of Time. It begins here, but the end we cannot see. I think, Athelyn, that in some other world we shall gather the fruit of the seeds that died barren here.”

These words are the last that are spoken between them alone. Mrs. Hastings comes to join them, announcing that they must not stay much longer, and she wants a chat with Paul.

She has her chat, is sympathetic, maternal, regretful; she observes every five minutes they must be going immediately, yet lingers nearly half an hour. The twilight has

closed before she and Athelyn take their leave of Paul at last.

There is no one near except a sailor or two, who are alike too busy and too accustomed to witnessing leave-takings to observe them with embarrassingly obtrusive interest. Mrs. Hastings sheds a tear, and bids her dear boy Paul write often, with a maternal embrace. Then it is Athelyn's turn.

She gives him both her hands and lifts her fair, pale face frankly and trustfully to his, and, as a brother kisses a dear sister, Paul bends and kisses Athelyn with a kiss of peace and parting.

"Good-bye!" is all he says.

"Dear Paul! good-bye!"

They cross the gangway and are on the quay. Athelyn looks back through the twilight to Paul, standing on the deck, alone; and a vision flashes across her of the parting that should have been, of the face

that should have looked back at her from his side. But he stands there among strangers, bound for a strange land, alone. She cannot see him for tears.

Almost in silence the mother and daughter drive home; and all the way the one thought uppermost in Athelyn's mind is not, "Paul is gone!" but "Is all the past gone with Paul? Is all the story ended now?"

CHAPTER IV.

AFTER THE INTERLUDE.

Now the days are all gone over
 Of our singing, love by lover,
 Days of summer-coloured seas—
 Days of many melodies !

Now the nights are all gone over
 Of our dreaming where dreams hover,
 In a mist of fair false things,
 Nights with quiet folded wings.

Now all good that comes or goes is
 As the scent of last year's roses,
 Or the shining in our eyes
 Of dead summer in past skies !

SWINBURNE.

TWO winters have come and gone ; the
 third winter has come, but shows no
 signs of going yet. Three springs have

poured fresh sap through the veins of the old earth, and seen her bud into green youth again ; three summers have strown the gardens with a shower of colours brighter than the rainbow, and ripened the cornfields into seas of waving amber ; three autumns have gathered the sheaves and quenched the scarlet blaze of poppies and scattered the woods with mellow russet, dying into gold and burning into red. Now winter has come into possession of the land again ; he is silvering the bare black skeleton trees, sucking all the warmth out of the sunlight even at noon, and brightening up the stars that gleam cold as ice-crystals in the midnight sky.

During this space of time, there have been the usual occurrences, great and small ; the world, like a huge machine of statistics, has ground out the proper average of pain and pleasure, of crime and heroism. There

have been the correct annual percentages of marriages and murders, loves, wars, and partings. When are Love and Death not busy? The eternal-edged scythe has mown down grain and flower, opening bud and faded stem; the little god of mischief has showered his arrows hap-hazard here and there as indiscriminately as usual. Grey head or beardless chin, rosy cheek or hollow eye, it is all the same to him, provided there is a bit of heart left to be his target. Consequent upon his good offices, each particular segment of every circle of human society, high and low, presents very much of a *Midsummer Night's Dream* entanglement—Demetrius in hot pursuit of Hermia, Hermia seeking Lysander, Lysander breathing fire for Helena, and Helena sighing for Demetrius—exactly as they were three years or three hundred years ago, and as they will be three years or three hundred years hence.

Whatever the passing seasons have done, they have left Athelyn Hastings alone. The lively little demon of Change has been too busy to pay any attention to her. Death has not set foot inside the narrow circle of her home-life and interests. Love, having that one season worked his will with her, has since then left her to the enjoyment of such stray fragments of tranquillity as he sometimes is generous enough to leave when he has smashed up a calm life's peace into shivers. Men have sought her, and she has turned from them, coolly, gently, indifferently. Harold Parkhurst's words have come true; in the marriage-mart she might have fetched a high price; there were hearts enough to beat faster under the changeful light of those golden-grey eyes of hers. But for no man since he left her has her calm pulse quickened or her cheek altered colour. She thinks now that she

will never know Love's anguish or rapture more.

She is beautiful as ever ; she is happy—if happiness is health of mind and body, content in daily life, and absence of sorrow ; and gay—if gaiety is to sing about the house, to laugh at small jokelets, to have a ready smile bright and fresh as morning to gladden those around.

Still Athelyn is as far from forgetting as from ostentatiously twining the willow-wreath in public round her brows. There is not a day that she does not think of Paul, still working his way upwards, fairly successful and prospering more and more, in Australia—of Harold, of whom she has seen nothing, heard little, and that little never directly from himself—of Cressida, whose fate is a mystery still, whose life has slipped out of their ken, and all traces of whom are lost from the day she disappear-

ed in Paris. Once only a rumour reached them in a round-about way, through one who professed to have recognised Cressida for a passing second—a rumour that blanched Athelyn's cheek and set in her heart a thorn never to be extracted, yet a rumour that scarcely went beyond her worst fears. For, friendless, moneyless, reckless, characterless, hopeless, what but evil was likely to have come to Cressida?

The thought of her is the bitterest drop in Athelyn's cup, the perpetual skeleton at her feast. The loss of Harold, even the failure of her faith, the sorrow of his sin, are among those pure and unalloyed griefs, those gentle eternal regrets, under which we learn to smile and look onwards and clasp our fading sorrow the closer as we near the end.

But the thought of Cressida is as a tangled skein in which dark threads of self-reproach

and remorse, however needless, are woven still. For ever when she thinks of her, the keynote of her reverie is a restless recurring regret—"If I had done otherwise!" or "If I had but known!" For ever in the depths of her conscience one bitter reflection lies, sleeping often, but which a thousand touches of association wake to stir and sting—"I was the cause!"

When she thinks of Cressida as she knew her and loved her first—and then as she may be now, if she still lives—she shrinks, winces as if a burning finger of reproach were laid on a stain in her own soul. And in lonely hours, when the world is not with her, a pair of mournful wistful blue eyes under a fair child-like brow look at her out of the past, clearly as if their parting look had been but yesterday, and plead "Can you forget?"

She walks through the world, revered

and loved, pure as an ice-maiden, on whose unsullied innocence the men who love her would stake their honour, and even the men who do not love her would risk their lives. And all the while the consciousness gnaws at her heart that through her, blameless as she is, one human soul was hurled into she knows not what black gulf of ruin; not by her doing, and yet through her. Was it not under her unsuspecting eyes that, by the chance of their mutual knowledge of her, they two met again? If Harold had not loved her and parted from her, his feelings yet working from that storm of love and parting, he might possibly not have been borne away by some reckless re-action when Fate threw him across Cressida's then smooth path again, to avail himself of his fatal influence. If it had not been for Cressida's early ignorance and too late discovery of Athelyn's love for

Harold, she would never, on that mad impulse of self-sacrifice, have fled from him and left no trace. True, Athelyn knows that she was for none of these things responsible ; no wilful act nor word of hers had brought the crisis on, but all the same she feels a remorseful pain in the remembrance that she, through her very effort to do the best, was in a way the sinless cause of the worst.

These thoughts lie at the bottom of her heart and seldom send a ripple to the surface. To all intents and purposes the volume of the story, that for a season linked those four lives into one chain, is closed and locked ; the links are scattered far and wide.

The dark and stormy and turbid currents that had flowed into her peaceful life and mixed with it for awhile, had passed and left it clear and calm again, as from the

translucent blue lake the white Rhone surges out and rushes on its way. The influences that might have subtly poisoned the finer powers of her soul assailed her in vain ; "some natures take no poison." The noxious vapours sank from her life, and left her breathing again the free, pure air above. All was over now ; those dark days lay far behind. Through the fierce fire of disillusionment she passed scatheless, only it had burnt all the little dross of vanity and pride and selfishness out of her heart.

It is a winter day without ice or snow ; no frost sharpening the air, but no warmth in the pale red afternoon sun. At Charlton station the carriage from Lakeside is waiting. Lady Manville and another young lady have driven there betimes in readiness to receive Miss Hastings, who is expected by the coming train.

Charlton station is chill and dreary; the raw, damp air is far worse than a good clear frost, but the only persons who fully realise the cold and discomfort of waiting are an old couple who are shivering amongst their piled-up hand-baggage in the draughty little waiting-room. The porter and station-master are inured to all inclemencies of weather; the ladies in the carriage are snugly wrapped in furs, with a buffalo skin over their knees, and becoming veils guarding their complexions.

They have not long to wait; the train is only a few minutes behind its time (in the memory of man the trains on this little local line have never been known to be quite punctual), and the face of the expected guest is looking out of a first-class window; it is a bright, fresh, and animated face; the cool air has given a colour to her delicate cheeks, and she is smiling gaily as she

catches sight of Lady Manville's waving hand, and hastens light-footed across the platform to the waiting carriage.

Athelyn never pays a visit to Lakeside without the old memories waking; but with each successive season that past seems more and more like a dream; and as since then she has been to stay with Lady Manville several times, the keenness has been taken off the edge of the associations which Lakeside arouses still.

The ladies meet with feminine demonstrations; with a little gush of kisses and welcomes. They have a great deal to say to each other. First there are the children to be inquired after; there is another olive-branch at Lakeside now, a little girl of whose clever sayings her proud parents have a set of anecdotes ready to regale every fresh arrival. After these have been related to, and admired by, Athelyn, the health of

various people is to be inquired into. Of Athelyn's mother, her grandfather, of Miss Bartlett's brother, of Lady Manville's father. Athelyn does not inquire about Sir John, because there is not the slightest doubt of *his* being in robust and ruddy health. Then Lady Manville begins, hospitably,

"Now, Athelyn, you can stay over Monday, can't you? There's a dance at Lord Heathfield's on Monday night; and Aubrey Heathfield will be disappointed if you're not there. Oh, you *must* stay! The Heathfields and some other people are coming to dinner on Friday, and we're going to get up a little impromptu dance, for your especial benefit. I haven't forgotten the Heathfield waltzes! The 'especial benefit' is to be applied in the plural. Dorcas, my dear," the little lady adds, turning to Miss Bartlett, "it's for yours and Athelyn's—not for Mary's; *she* doesn't want to be 'benefited'

any more. I told you about Mary Graham, didn't I, Athelyn? And you know she is with us now, she and her *fiancé*. Have you seen him? No? Oh, such a dear fellow! and you know they met for the first time at *our* house! I saw he was struck at once. Oh, why don't you two girls follow Mary Graham's example?"

"Captain St. Maur might object to sharing his affections between three of us," suggests Athelyn. "I see Time hasn't cured you of your matchmaking propensities."

"No, I get worse and worse," her hostess observes, complacently.

"Have you done much mischief in that line this year?"

"I'm sorry to say the Graham-St. Maur engagement is the only thing I have achieved. You and Dorcas are two ungrateful little minxes! you don't appreciate all my exertions on your behalf. What do you

think, Athelyn? I had a hideous hump-backed old widower, with fifty thousand pounds and a peerage only two lives off, here in the summer; and owing to an opportunity I kindly afforded them, he laid himself and his thousands at Dorcas's feet. And would you believe it, she refused to pick them up? And odder still, I thought the better of her for it."

"So I should imagine," Athelyn rejoined, smiling, while Miss Bartlett breathes a deprecating, "Oh, Sophy!"

Dorcas Bartlett is a pretty gazelle-eyed woman with a dove-like puritan air, who seldom speaks, and is sufficiently accustomed to Sophy Manville's audacious banter to be no longer embarrassed and shocked by it.

"Now Mary Graham's is an ideal match," Lady Manville resumes, "in all but the one important point of money; but then, George St. Maur is as handsome as a picture, and

you can't always expect an Apollo face and a fortune to go together. He has expectations, of course, and his pay, and an old uncle, and he is awfully in love."

"Does that count as more or less important than the old uncle and the expectations?"

"More, in the present stage of spooniness—in Mary's eyes, at least; it makes me feel quite young and sentimental to watch my turtle-doves. By-the-by, Athelyn, did I tell you we've asked your old admirer Parkhurst to come over to-morrow?"

This piece of information crashes into the peaceful array of Athelyn's thoughts like a bomb-shell, the more confounding on account of the unintentional implied *à propos* of Lady Manville's speech.

"Who did you say?" she asks, startled and blushing scarlet.

"Harold Parkhurst—come, you are not

going to pretend you've forgotten him? One nail knocks out another, doesn't it? but you needn't profess to ignore the existence of the knocked-out nails. Last time I saw him he was looking great spoons at Dora Urquhart; but the old lady spread her maternal wings, and fluttered and cackled and scared him off the field. The Blys are coming on Thursday—the handsome fat man with the voice, you know—and all the Heathfields on Friday; so you won't have too dull a time."

Sophy Manville does not know the whole story of Harold and Athelyn; she regards it as a dead-and-gone flirtation, the romance of a season, as much a thing of the past as that season's bouquets.

That one or other of the two was somewhat seriously damaged for the time she thinks probable; but that time is long ago, and all its land-marks left behind. Besides

she is now too much absorbed in the present and promising loves of Mary Graham and her handsome Captain—a pair who met and courted under her own roof—to have much interest to spare for an old story, for a wasted withered flower that died unfruitful. Matrimony is the aim and end of a woman's life. For the loves that die or are slain before they reach that promised land, the only thing to do is to bury their bodies out of the way as quickly as decency allows. So Sophy Manville very sensibly thinks.

At the news of Harold Parkhurst's expected arrival, Athelyn is taken aback and inwardly fluttered; it costs her an effort to keep up the conversation in the same light and lively tone; but in her heart she is not sorry. Was a woman ever sorry to run the risk of breaking up a hardly-earned and long-striven for, attained at last, tranquillity? She may protest that she values

peace of mind above all earthly gifts, and may not over-rate the price she sets upon it. But nevertheless, give her the chance of shattering to atoms this treasure of peace—and no chain will be strong enough to hold her from hastening to hazard it.

Athelyn has often wondered whether she should ever see him again. Sometimes she has said to herself, bitterly, and sometimes with a sort of relief, “Never—never again! our ways are apart for ever!” Sometimes she has regarded it as most probable—as she as a rule lives full half the year in London, and as London is still his head-quarters, though he is a great deal abroad—that they will some day meet. But as the years have slipped away, the idea of meeting him has begun to recede from the thoughts of her daily life and fall back into her dreams. And of meeting him here, at Lakeside, where she met him first—of treading with

him again the old paths where first their love began—she has never thought except in fancies of well-nigh impossible futures.

And lo ! behold she is here, in this place so dear to her through memories of him ; and he is expected. Expected ! not arrived. It seems to her impossible that he should really come. To-morrow ! An evening, a night, and a day ! Even as she counts, the evening has slid by, the night has come and gone, and the “ to-morrow ” is to-day ! He will come to-day.

The nearer the hour draws at which he is expected, the more difficult it grows to her to realise that she will look upon his face again so soon. She wonders what she will feel ? At present—her first startled surprise being over—she feels nothing, though she has now attained sufficient self-knowledge to be very sure that if he should

not come she will wake to feeling sharply enough. If the day should pass without him, she will dread the solitude of the night wherein she will be left a prey to her own thoughts.

It seems to her unnatural that she should feel so little now the time has come so near. She wonders whether the pain of seeing him, now that he is hers no more, will strike deeper than the joy of hearing the once so well-loved voice that for years has only whispered in her dreams? But she cannot realise either joy or pain; they pass like shadows before her, and she cannot grasp them. Then she wonders, is her love for him dead? How long does it take for Time to murder Love? It is four full years and a half since that golden summer of their meeting; three years since the bleak winter of their last good-bye. For three

years Love has been slowly starving in absence and hopelessness. Has it perished at last?

Harold Parkhurst meanwhile is not indulging in any such introspection as regards their meeting. For one thing, he does not know that she is at Lakeside; and if he did know it, he probably would not dwell much on his possible and prospective feelings. A woman is wondering what she *can, may, or will* feel, while a man looks no further than what he *has* felt; and if he be a Harold Parkhurst, he generally limits the horizon of his interest to what at the moment he *is* feeling.

Still it is impossible for him to visit Lakeside without recollections of Athelyn crowding upon him; the whole place is steeped in associations recalling her, and her only, to his mind; every object, from the garden-gate to the path leading to the ponds, bears

to him reminders of their brief bright dawn of love.

She is so present to his mind that it is scarcely a surprise to him when Sir John observes, as he pours out a glass of old Madeira for the traveller's refreshment and presses hospitable offers of cutlets upon him,

“Miss Hastings is here; you remember her?”

CHAPTER V.

SLEEPING OR DEAD ?

O love ! still throbs your living heart,
 You have not crossed Death's sullen tide ;
 A deeper deep holds us apart ;
 We were more near if you had died !
 If you had died in those old days
 When light was on the shining sea,
 And all the fragrant woodland ways
 Were paths of hope for you and me.

LOUISE CHANDLER MOULTON.

THE last gleams of the short winter daylight are fading fast, and Night is hurrying to chase them westward to other climes—by the time Mr. Parkhurst enters the drawing-room in company with Sir John and Captain St. Maur.

The lamps are not lit, the ladies having unanimously voted for a firelight gossip. The curtains are drawn ; a fine old English log on the great fire is crackling merrily ; the flames seem to be having a playful contest as to which can leap highest, and by the dancing red gleams that shoot across the room and suddenly retreat and dart out their long flickering tongues again in another direction, Harold Parkhurst views the group of which Athelyn is one.

There is nothing cosier than such a firelight party ; the arm-chairs and sofas are drawn in comfortable disorder round the hearth, and even in this the brightest, cheeriest spot in the great shadowy-cornered room, the members of the group are not very easily identified in the fitful fire-gleams. It is only to be distinguished that there are two black ladies, two neutral-tinted, a discriminating ray of light flickering upon the

golden head of a fifth figure, and upon a dress whose bright sheeny folds are just definable as blue. One black lady, little and lively, rises alertly to greet the new arrival; the golden head is lifted as Captain St. Maur hastens to the side of the blue dress that marks his *fiancée*.

“Here are Miss Hastings and Miss Bartlett—if you can distinguish in this obscurity which is which!” says Lady Manville, indicating a black figure back in the shadow, and a grey figure close beside.

“I think I shall find no difficulty; I’ve an owl-like capacity for seeing in the dark. Miss Bartlett, it is a long time since we have met. Miss Hastings——” He utters her name in the same tone and holds out his hand in the same way as he had greeted Dorcas Bartlett. Athelyn gives to his brief clasp a slight cold hand that does not tremble.

"It is a long time since we have met too," she says, feeling she must say something, and stupidly unable to find any other words than an exact echo of his remark to Miss Bartlett.

"Don't count how long, for goodness' sake !" exclaims Lady Manville, gaily. "It always makes one feel so old when people begin reckoning up the years since they met."

"I don't think you have any reason to be sensitive on that point ; you needn't mind if we were all seized with fits of retrospection !" says Mr. Parkhurst.

"You can't tell how we are all looking by this light, but I think I can assure you we have all worn pretty well," Lady Manville observes, with her usual candour. "I ought to apologise for not having the lamps lit to receive you. Do you like the fire-light?"

“Immensely; it leaves so much to the imagination!”

“That’s unflattering,” laughs the little lady, sinking back comfortably into the nest of cushions in her chair. “Jack, dear, stir up a bigger blaze. There’s a chair, Mr. Parkhurst—and tea will be in soon.”

The chair she indicates is between herself and Miss Bartlett, but as Athelyn’s place is on Miss Bartlett’s other side, it is not far from him, and he twists his chair forward into such a position as to get a good central view of all the party, and especially of *her*.

As the ruddy light flickers fitfully on her dark-robed figure, and lends a spurious glow to her oval cheek, he finds her unchanged. Once or twice he catches the pure outline of her profile; he notices, with interest too warm for such a trifle, that she has altered the fashion of the coiled knot in which she arranges her hair. The slow turn of her

head is familiar to him—the very droop of the hand that idly holds a feather fan. It seems just now to him as if no other woman ever stirred with that slow grace. He wishes for the lamps to show him if there is the same flawless lily-fairness in her complexion, the same tender, child-like curve in the Cupid's bow-lips, the same deep light as of moonlit seas in her eyes that he remembers of old—he wonders, will they seem the same to him now ?

She has been conjecturing what she will feel in meeting him, wondering if Love is dead or sleeping, if her heart will leap with the old passion in his presence again ? Now he is here ; he is near her ; his glance turned ever and anon towards her, and though his words are not addressed to her, she hears his voice. Now, is it joy or pain ?

All things are strange about Love—its hydra-like tenacity of life—its sometimes

unaccountable death—the equal impossibility of slaying it by violence, and of breathing a second's life into it when once dead. Not the least strange is the bare and absolute simplicity of its power. It is simple as a child's cry, strong as a lion's leap. Nothing conflicts with it, because all is part of it; nothing over-rules it, because it in itself comprises all.

Now that Athelyn's ears are drinking in the familiar tones again, that she sees the flickering light on that pale dark-browed face, now, if she were to drop the restraints of conventionalism, if no witnesses were by, and if she were to follow her heart—then simply and naturally as a child runs to its mother's arms, she would sink on her knees at his side and cling to him again, with one great sob of rest attained! She does not even recollect how they parted; she forgets all but that he is near. The bird

does not fold its wings and dip into its nest more instinctively and innocently than she would fly to the shelter of his arms and rest her head upon his heart and be at peace—if simple instinct swayed her now.

There is her home ; and she looks on it from her exile with yearning eyes. She feels now suddenly so weary ; and there is her haven and her rest—her home that she must never seek, her Paradise from which the unseen crystal bar shuts her out.

She feels no agitation, no passion of sorrow nor joy ; only a vague child-like wish that all these people would go away, and leave her and Harold together—that she might hear from his lips just once more the old tender words. The past at that moment she has forgotten ; the future is not. She only feels what the present hour might be.

Tea is brought in ; lamps are lit ; the stir

wakes Athelyn from a sort of dream. They take a clearer view of each other now in the light. He is the more changed of the two; his face seems somehow less darkly delicate in its outlines; some subtle shade of refined feeling seems to have faded from his expression; his bold black eyes are more reckless, his smile more cynical. Perhaps none but Athelyn would have noticed the faint and scarcely perceptible change at all; it is rather to be felt than seen; but upon her it steals with a cold tightening of sorrow at her heart, and then an anguish of yearning and regret.

He glances at her often; but enters into no conversation with her beyond expressing once with courteous interest a "hope that Mrs. Hastings is well?" At dinner his place is far from hers; after dinner he is one of the detachment of smokers who come into the drawing-room very late.

When he makes his appearance at last, he steers straight towards the bright-eyed widow, Mrs. Dering, and immediately devotes himself to her. Athelyn is apparently absorbed by the Rev. Mr. Bartlett, who is pouring into her ears his grievance on the score of an altar-cloth which has been calumniated as "Ritualistic," she sees, without seeming to watch, Harold bending over Mrs. Dering's chair—and hears without seeming to listen, their whispers and low laughter. She tells herself she is perfectly indifferent; what is it to her now? she tries to regard it from a cool and dispassionate height; but she hates to see and to hear, and yet could not to save her life keep her eye from passing glances—her ear from catching casual words.

Impatient with herself, she moves away with her attendant cavalier to the piano, and plunges into a deep interest in the selection

of songs new and old in the music-stand, prevails upon Miss Bartlett to sing "The Lady of the Lea," and then plays the accompaniment to a duet between Mr. Bly and Miss Graham, during which Miss Graham's *fiancé* looks as if he thought very lightly of Mr. Bly's boasted baritone, whose deep rich notes his enthusiastic admirers pronounce "divine."

The evening draws to its end. It seems strange to Athelyn that she should have been half a day under the same roof with her old lover, and yet they have scarcely exchanged a dozen words.

"How times change, don't they?" she hears Lady Manville saying to somebody in her clear voice, *à propos* of what Athelyn has not the slightest idea; but she finds that she is repeating to herself over and over again with meaningless iteration, "Times change, don't they?"

She is standing by the piano looking over the music Dorcas Bartlett had left open; the Reverend Alfred's attention, which had been faithful to her during the evening, is called away from her by an appeal from his hostess; Mr. Bly is discreetly edging away from Captain St. Maur and his betrothed, who are looking into each other's eyes and drifting apart from the rest of the circle.

Harold Parkhurst leaves his fair widow somewhat abruptly, and moves aimlessly and with an accidental air towards the piano, where Athelyn now stands alone.

"Pretty song, this," he observes, taking up one of the German Volkslieder as he draws close to her side.

Then casting one of his quick intent glances at her, he adds in a slightly lowered tone,

"So you're not married, Athelyn?" not in the least tenderly or significantly, but

calling her by her Christian name as naturally as if they had parted but yesterday, as if it were still a familiar every-day utterance on his lips.

“No,” she says; and then adds, half lightly, half earnestly, and not looking in his face, “Nor you?”

“I?” he echoes, with his most unpleasant smile. “I am likely to marry, am I not? An eligible marrying man! There would have to be two fools to that bargain, and my folly is not likely to take that direction.”

She makes no answer; her closed lips do not even vouchsafe a smile; she calmly puts the music back in the portfolio and moves leisurely away. So those light and bitter words of his, almost roughly spoken, are the last she hears from him that night.

CHAPTER VI.

TREADING THE OLD WAYS.

That June day,
 Too deeply sunk in craterous sunsets now
 For you or me to dig it up alive—
 To pluck it out all bleeding with spent flame
 At the roots, before those moralising stars
 We have got instead!—that poor lost day!

E. B. BROWNING.

“**T**O-DAY is Thursday—and he is going
 on Saturday! To-day, and to-
 morrow—only two clear days!”

This is the first waking thought that defines itself in Athelyn’s mind in the morning. ‘She finds herself counting with mechanical reiteration, “Thursday, Friday,

two clear days!" Then she catches herself up sharply. "Two days too many probably! If I had known that he would be here, I would not have come!"

She has rather a habit of soliloquising, and answers herself witheringly now, "Would you not? Don't try to deceive yourself; you would have come a hundred miles to see him."

Woman-like, she moves across to the mirror. How white her face looks in its dark setting of loosened hair! was she as pale as this last night? She draws up the blind, to let the full flood of the cool winter light stream in, and stares anxiously into the reflection that looks with wide anxious eyes back at her from the glass, and wonders "Am I changed?"

There is a frost this morning; a brilliant blue sky; a dainty veil of silver lace-work spread over the lawns and clinging round

the bare trees, a clear keen sun that will soon melt away this fragile lacing of the delicate-fingered white frost. After breakfast the gentlemen one and all disappear, some to the billiard-room, some to the stables and kennels, all to smoke. When an hour or two of fancy work has palled upon them, the ladies also wrap up in their furs and go out to brave the bright crisp air. They take their way to the ponds, speculating how soon there will be a probability of ice forming, planning a skating-party.

At the water side, while they are lamenting that in spite of the frail glazing over the tiny pools on the shore, there is as yet no faintest promise of ice on the big pond, they are one and all animated into fresh vivacity by the appearance of the gentlemen coming to join them. Each of these welcome intruders seeks out the fair one who seems to him fairest, if not "discreetest,

wisest, virtuouslest and best." At least, they make their choice, on what grounds their own conscience best can tell.

Lady Manville, sparkingly pretty in sable furs and a saucy little hat with a robin on it, is the metal most attractive to the handsome baritone. Captain St. Maur, as in duty bound, hastens to Mary Graham's side; Sir John, with a couple of setters at his heels, saunters beside Miss Bartlett, with whom he is on sufficiently intimate terms to feel himself exempt from the duty of being amusing. Mrs. Dering, picturesque in a rich Indian shawl, with great black eyes beaming behind a becoming spotted veil, proves the magnet to Harold Parkhurst, who turns to her straightway, while naturally Mr. Bartlett pairs off with Athelyn.

For a time these two latter couples keep together in a not very conversational quar-

tette. Mrs. Dering and Mr. Parkhurst are apparently going in for a little practice of the artillery of glances ; both being presumably shot-proof are pretty well matched ; yet somehow they do not drift away from the tall curate and Athelyn, though it is not by the latter's will that they remain neighbours.

“ A pretty piece of water this, isn't it ? ” Mr. Parkhurst observes. “ It looks better in the summer though, when the lilies are all out, and the little green island is covered with wild flowers.”

He is addressing Mrs. Dering, looking at Mrs. Dering, but by unerring instinct Athelyn knows the words are meant for her own ear.

“ I have never been here in summer,” the widow says.

“ Nor have I, for a very long time,” he

rejoins. "I scarcely remember how many years it is, and I shouldn't care to count them."

The remark is cruel; he means it to be so, and Athelyn knows he means it. This knowledge robs it of a little of its sting, but only of a little. As she passes him by, she looks at him casually for half a moment with cool indifferent eyes, as if he were a stranger, and turns to Mr. Bartlett and laughs with her lightest gayest tone at one of that reverend young man's mild jokes.

The day begins sadly for her, goes on sadly, the more sadly because she seems, and knows she seems, her brightest self. They walk the old well-known ways, so near together each hears the other's words, so far apart it is as if a Polar sea lay frozen between them. There is not a turn of the path, not a tree in the garden, that does not recall to her one glorious June when the

nights were lovelier than the days, when those black branches were clad in their summer robes of green, when those barren borders were bursting with blossoms.

This day is like the skeleton of that season dug up from its grave; it is too real for a ghost; there is nothing dreamy or shadowy about it. There are the dry, dead bones of what once breathed in warm, soft, living beauty. The three trees on the island seem to point skeleton fingers at her—the lifeless relics of the fair, dead summer. She wishes she had not seen them; it were better the dead should rest!

She watches the betrothed couple, who are indeed a centre of interest at Lakeside just now, and the sight of them serves to make the contrast between *this* season and *that* more grim.

Mary Graham is very young, very pretty, very happy, and fully conscious—albeit,

shyly and gracefully so—of the honours of her position. She is queen of the company for the time ; sympathetic eyes watch her and her handsome captain, and discreetly avert themselves when it seems fit. Her trousseau is a subject of equal interest to maids and matrons ; all the company unite in delicate manœuvres to leave the *fiancés tête-à-tête*.

Watching these happy lovers, Athelyn feels as a wanderer locked out in the cold, looking up at the lighted windows of a home like one from which he is for ever outcast, on whom the red rays of the cheery Christmas fire flicker from afar, not to warm, but to make the darkness and the chill of the bleak night more bitter. It seems that, through all these changing years, never till now has she felt so keenly that she is an outcast from joy.

So the day that begun sadly draws sadly

to its end, and in it, from morn to midnight, there is no redeeming hour.

The next day dawns—Friday, the last clear day of his visit. “He goes to-morrow!” is again her first waking thought, and though his presence is to her an hourly pain, it cannot be a pain without alloy, for the foreshadowing of his going seems to darken all the day.

He never talks to Athelyn, except when courtesy renders it compulsory; he never seeks her—nay, it seems to her that he delicately and skilfully manœuvres to avoid her, yet there is in his manner no such marked coldness and reserve as to attract notice or arouse a suspicion of repressed feeling. He is cool, easy, self-possessed, as if the near neighbourhood of the girl he once loved so passionately was utterly powerless to affect his equilibrium by so much as a hair’s breadth.

He makes himself agreeable to Dorcas Bartlett, who listens with a serene smile and cautious unresponsiveness. She is rather on her guard against Mr. Parkhurst; in her imagination he “goeth about seeking whom he may devour,” in a guise more dangerous than that of a roaring lion. If he suspected he was regarded with caution, it would probably be bad for Miss Bartlett, as he is not accustomed to fail, and to fence the fold against him is the surest way to challenge him to leap the palings. It is not an amiable trait; but his nature on the whole is not an amiable one. Still Rumour has not belied him in ticketing him “dangerous,” and although Dorcas Bartlett is one of the calm, non-inflammable, domestic-minded young ladies to whom the marauding wolf is not the most attractive form in which a man can present himself—still it is well for her that no look nor word of hers sets his

self-love in arms or challenges him to the conquest.

He remains faithful—for him—to Mrs. Dering and takes her for a long walk, which attracts attention by making them late for lunch. But to Athelyn he still offers no attention beyond the most ordinary courtesies, offered with a light suave tone and a pleasant smile that sting her almost to a betrayal of bitterness. *Almost*, but never *quite*. Athelyn is thorough-bred, and would walk smiling, light-footed, and calm-eyed, over the fieriest ploughshares—while the world looked on.

Children are fond of Athelyn always. The little Manvilles are no exceptions to the rule. That afternoon Mr. Parkhurst, happening to saunter into the drawing-room shortly before tea, finds only Athelyn and the children there at the moment. Totty is on her lap ; Johnny is leaning at her side

staring at her locket, her chain, the silver arrow in her hair, his inquisitive fingers following the direction of his eyes, as he takes note of all these charms. In the sincerity of his admiration he appeals, partly to his small sister and partly to Mr. Parkhurst, as that gentleman—who is also a favourite of his—draws near.

“Isn’t she pretty?”

Mr. Parkhurst glances at Athelyn, whose face is just then bent and screened behind Totty’s curly blonde head; he only catches a glimpse of a crimsoned cheek, as she remonstrates, half laughing half embarrassed, with her too candid young admirer, in whose opinion Mr. Parkhurst expresses, with an amused smile, his entire accordance.

Encouraged by this agreement, and in no way repressed by Athelyn’s laughing and deprecating exclamation, “Johnny—

Johnny!" the small heir of the Manvilles continues his confidences.

"When I grow up, I'm going to marry Athelyn," is his next announcement.

"Wise boy!" says Mr. Parkhurst, pleasantly, in that friendly tone which ingratiates him into Johnny's affections, but which somehow unaccountably grates on Athelyn's ear.

"Well, I'll wait for you, Johnny, only you must make haste and grow up, else I shall have so long to wait!" she says, gaily.

"Captain St. Maur is going to marry Miss Graham," observes Totty, solemnly, putting in her word with the gravity that befits its importance. Johnny appears to regard this as an implied reflection on his own choice, for he says as if answering a challenge, while gazing admiringly at Athelyn,

"*She's* prettier—she's got bigger eyes!"

The big eyes brighten with irrepressible mirth at this.

"Comparisons are odorous," she says, laughing.

"What's that mean?" asks Johnny, who is of an inquiring bent.

"All young ladies are equally pretty, and there is no one prettier than another," Mr. Parkhurst explains.

"That's not true," says Johnny, stoutly. Then Totty, whose mind is apparently running on matrimony, inquires:

"Do lovers always marry their lovelasses?"

"Generally they do," Mr. Parkhurst replies promptly.

"Then," demands Johnny, taking up the catechism, "when they're married do they go on being lovers?"

"Well, generally they don't; they stop that after the honeymoon."

Johnny ponders this state of things for awhile, and then announces,

“I don’t believe that’s true either.”

Athelyn smiles and smooths the boy’s curls approvingly.

“He does not appear to have any great opinion of your veracity,” she says, glancing up at Harold Parkhurst.

It is the first time she has addressed him with anything of the old frank and familiar gaiety in her tone. But he does not answer, he only looks at her. She is a pretty picture in her rich dark dress with the little white-frocked, blonde-haired girl on her lap, the boy clinging to her side, her pale fair face close to Totty’s chubby cheek, her womanly beauty heightened and perfected by the contrast with that soft and round and rosy childish loveliness.

By a half unconscious instinct she clasps Totty closer in her arms; the child seems

somehow a screen and shield ; and though there is nothing, no faintest fear nor lightest doubt, to lead her to seek shelter, yet that vague blind instinct moves her to cling as closely as if to some safeguard to the little soft fair creature whose face is lifted caressingly for her to kiss.

Still he does not speak ; she knows his eyes are fixed on her, knows without meeting their gaze that they are softening into the old tenderness, clouded with a deeper sadness than of old. For the first time since they have met again she feels strangely agitated ; his silence stirs her more than any speech could do. Her heart begins to throb, and the blood seems to flame through her veins. She tries to lift her eyes to meet his, but the magnetic power in his look is too strong, she cannot face it, and her own eyes sink again ; she knows he cannot fail to notice her changing colour and the betraying

quiver of her lip; and the consciousness sends a deep flush burning to her very brow, as she hides her face behind Totty's yellow curls. She does not know whether it is with a start of disappointment or relief that she hears the door thrown open, and two tall footmen enter bearing a tea-tray and a lamp, in readiness for the coming dusk that as yet has scarcely cast a shadow.

Then the rest of the party drop in by ones and twos, and Harold turns away from her to Mrs. Dering, and comes back to her no more.

That evening Lord Heathfield and his family, and several other neighbours from far and near, dine at Lakeside. Mr. Aubrey Heathfield (nephew, but not heir, nor likely to be, unless his cousin should die unmarried, but still a *parti* on his own account, expectations put aside), makes straight for Athelyn, with a directness and an air of

satisfaction which Harold Parkhurst observes with a sort of displeased interest. This interest, albeit admirably concealed under his usual *sang-froid*, in no way diminishes or assumes a more gratifying colour during dinner, when Mr. Heathfield and Athelyn sit opposite to him, apparently enjoying the monopoly of each other's attention, and with no signs betraying that the pleasure of this mutual absorption is chiefly on one side.

Aubrey Heathfield is not clever certainly, but he is not an unsatisfactory partner in conversation ; he laughs at Athelyn's mildest jokes, perceives brilliant suggestions in her simplest remarks, and reads subtle meanings in her silence. He himself has never said a brilliant thing, nor, to admit the truth, has Athelyn, whose gift is rather of sympathetic silence than of fluent speech ; but he invests her with ideal qualities. He is

possibly no saint, was probably a troublesome youth to his tutor, and certainly one of the naughty boys at school; but good-nature, good-temper, honesty and truth are written in Nature's largest print on his fair healthy good-looking Saxon face, and just as plainly when he looks at Athelyn is written his admiration for her.

After dinner there is dancing in the great hall—real dancing, with ample room for the swing and sweep of the circle of waltzers, not the struggling for space to spin on one's own axis of the crowded London ball-room. Mr. Heathfield dances well, and Athelyn loves dancing. It may be one of the lowest class of pleasures, but it is not the least enthralling, for the time; and she delights in it as she delights in beauty in every form and phase. Aubrey Heathfield is one of her favourite partners this season. With him she has no fear of being whirled

into violent collision with another couple, of being bumped or jerked or jarred out of step, hurled against sharp-cornered pieces of furniture or capsized into the fireplace. She may abandon herself in peace to the simple enjoyment of perfect rhythm of movement.

Their steps accord faultlessly; it is a wedding of music and motion in one complete harmony; the brilliant melody that clashes out in changing cadence seems actually a part of their being; their very breathing is attuned to it, their pulses beat to it, as they circle round smoothly, buoyantly, as if borne on strong sea-waves. The more she recollects of another dance under this roof, the more she flings herself into the pleasure of this hour. It skims the surface of her nature only; but such as it is, it suffices for the time; unto the hour, the hour.

They fly round until floor and ceiling swim together in Athelyn's eyes; she is resting on Aubrey Heathfield's arm, tired, flushed, breathless and beautiful, her eyes shining with the fleeting pleasure of the moment—when she sees Harold Parkhurst standing close by. For one second, not more, she meets his glance; there is a sort of cynical displeasure in that brief look which he so soon averts from her. She is scarcely conscious how or why she draws a little away from the strong arm on which a moment before she was leaning securely, confidently.

But for the next waltz also she is pledged to Mr. Heathfield; and she cannot withdraw from her promise; no plea of fatigue would avail while her foot is so light and her step so true. After this dance she sits down in the drawing-room beside Dorcas Bartlett. Mr. Heathfield reluctantly quits her side to

seek his plighted partner and fulfil his engagement for the next dance; then Miss Bartlett is also claimed and carried off; Athelyn is for the moment left alone. Only for the moment. Harold Parkhurst's eyes are on her; he turns out of the dancing hall, and comes quickly across the drawing-room to her side, and bends over her chair with something of the old air of possession.

“One can't speak here; there will be some fellow after you in a minute,” he says, without premise or preliminary. “Come into the conservatory!” He speaks with a tone of unquestioning, unquestionable authority; and she, to whom he is “nothing” now, yields as instant and implicit obedience as a docile child, only with the self-possessed air of a queen. She rises and passes on to the conservatory, cool and leisure of step and tranquil of look, but her heart beginning to beat faster now than in the whirl of the

waltz, pulsing anxiously yet rejoicingly. At last, after these days of silence and commonplace, of trivialities uttered in public and absolute avoidance of all private converse, at last it is his will to speak to her what he wishes none else to hear. She scarcely cares whether they are sweet or bitter words that he has to say. They are certainly rather bitter than sweet tones in which he abruptly begins the conversation.

“Is that the man?” jerking his head indicatively towards the dancing-room.

“What man?” she asks, following his look perplexedly.

“The man you’ll marry—curses on his head!”

“Whom do you mean?”

“That fellow Heathfield, of course; who else should I mean?”

“He is *not* the man,” she answers curtly, flushing.

“Who is it then?” he rejoins. “I’ll transfer my good wishes to him, whoever he is.”

“There’s no one,” she replies, still briefly, and with her head held proudly high.

“No one, eh?” he says, pauses a moment, then adds, “Now, Athelyn, why don’t you tell me it’s not my business? For it’s *not*, you know, and never will be again!” He looks at her steadily, and as steadily, keeping silence, she meets his look. “The last words you wrote me,” he continues, “were that you had nothing to say to me but good-bye. You remember?”

“I remember—everything,” she says, sadly, and her eyes sink from his.

“If you had known that I was here, you would not have come, would you?”

She makes no answer, stands silent in her pure and noble beauty before him, the flush slowly fading from her cheek, her eyes

downcast, still as a statue, save for the faint rising and falling of the laces on her breast. She has a red camellia in her hair; it has been loosened by the movement of the dance, and is half dropping on her shoulder.

“You’ll lose your flower,” he says, with one of his quick transitions of tone, glancing towards the drooping spray.

The words, the gesture bring before him quick as a flash a picture of her, as years ago—how many long years it seems, and yet but yesterday!—in this very conservatory among these great tropic ferns, she blushed and trembled under his look, and with shy hands and appealing eyes gave him the rose she wore. He remembers it was a deep red rose; he remembers suddenly the very words he had said—“I will keep it till I die, or till I forget you!”

Where is that red rose now? “Où sont

les neiges d'autan?" He took it to India in his pocket-book certainly, but that is years ago. Now he would have to rack his brains to recollect what became of pocket-book and rose. "Till I die or till I forget you!" Had he forgotten Athelyn then? The reflection is unpleasant. Harold hates reminiscences that make him uncomfortable, and any sensation of self-reproach he resents, either upon himself or upon any convenient object, as the mood may move him.

"This is grim as a charnel-house," he bursts out. "I would as soon look into the Morgue as upon your face! Yet it is a fair face, Athelyn!" he adds, softening a little. "I wish I had not seen it!"

She looks up then, not reproachfully, not hurt or angry, but at heart stirred with a strange joy, for she knows well that no indifference ever prompted those words so roughly and brusquely spoken.

“You will not see it for long,” she says, half sadly, in spite of that joyful throb at her heart, for it is but a bitter joy akin to pain; “to-morrow is the last day.” An involuntary, half unconscious sigh escapes her, and checking it hastily, she continues, in a lighter tone, “And for the brief time that we are under the same roof, you are under no compulsion to look at me at all.”

“No, under no compulsion,” he echoes.

Just then there is a sound of silk rustling through the adjoining room, of voices talking and laughing drawing near.

“Here they come!” Harold says, looking half impatiently at the approaching battalion. “Your world claims you again; go back to your dance!”

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE WINTER TWILIGHT.

I dreamt I was in Sicily,
 All sky and hills and flowers ;
 We sat us under a citron-tree,
 And courted hours and hours.

I woke by the dunes of a bleak north land
 Along a lonely grave in the snow ;
 The salt wind rattled the ivy band
 I'd tied at the headstone long ago.

THEO. MARZIALS.

IT is Saturday—Harold Parkhurst's last day at Lakeside—last fragment of a day, as he is to leave before dinner. The hour of his departure is now not very far off, and he and Athelyn are in the lofty oak-panelled library *tête-à-tête* in the fitful

gloom of falling dusk and flickering fire-light.

There is a driving party this afternoon, but Mr. Parkhurst has not joined it because the hour of the return of the party is uncertain, and there is no uncertainty about the hour of departure of his train; Athelyn has not joined it, because the only time he spoke to her all the morning it was to whisper hastily, "Don't go with them on this excursion; I leave to-day! this afternoon is my last chance of seeing you." Athelyn stays behind accordingly; so also does Mr. Bly, an unconscious obstruction in the way of their wishes; and thus it happens that it is late in the afternoon before Harold and Athelyn escape the well-meaning attentions of the melodious Bly, see him safely off the scene, and find themselves alone in the library.

Although the dusk is falling fast, they

decline to have the lamps lit ; and cold as it is they turn away from the fire and stand in the deep recess of the bay-window looking out upon the winter landscape.

“It must be cold for them driving,” he observes.

“Yes,” she agrees ; and then there is a silence, which she breaks by an answering remark as deficient in originality as his.

“You will have a cold journey.”

“Yes.”

Silence again, while the shadows creep darker over the snow outside ; then he says, abruptly,

“I wanted to see you, Athelyn—I don’t know why. Now that we are here together, the last hour we shall have, is there anything to be said between us?”

She pauses, and it is in a low sad, half uncertain voice she answers,

"All that needs to be said was said long ago."

"In the time that you—" he too pauses before he adds, questioningly, "have forgotten?"

"In the time that you know well I have *not* forgotten. Instincts are sure in these things; and you know as well that I don't forget as I know that you know it. But of all that's come and gone, what use to speak?" she says, her head drooping with a weary sigh.

"There's no good in digging up the dead, is there, Athelyn?"

"None."

"And we can have nothing to say to each other, even now, that we are not very likely to see each other again?"

"Yes, one thing I have to say to you. Can you tell me—you will tell me if you can—" she urges, earnestly, and with a certain

confidence, for nothing earthly will shake the remnant of faith she holds in Harold still—"is there any news of—of *her*?"

"No, none."

"You do not know where she is?"

"I know nothing of her."

"Not even—not even if she is living or dead?"

"No. I know *nothing*, have heard nothing for all these years."

Athelyn looks out upon the pale dusk landscape silently for a minute, then speaks almost as if talking to herself.

"You do not even know if she is living. And all my inquiries of her old friends have been in vain. What has become of her? I shall never know real peace until this mystery is cleared up."

"Let it rest!" he rejoins, with the old half-impatient accent. "If you were to

clear it up, it could not be for pleasure or for good."

"For pleasure," she repeats. "No! pleasure is a word that has little to do with it. But because it is pain to remember, can I forget? Can I be at rest while there's no trouble on earth in which she may not be at this hour? And can I forget that now she would have been safe and happy as Paul Severne's wife?"

"Why didn't you console Paul Severne yourself?" Harold rejoins, wholly impatiently this time. "I shouldn't think he would have been inconsolable if you had gone in for comforting him. And it would have been appropriate too for the virtuous hero and heroine to have paired off and lived happy ever after in Pharisaical respectability and satisfaction."

Athelyn shrinks back as if he had struck

her a blow. Those words have smitten her into a silence that it seems to her she could not break if it were to last for hours. He looks at her; he can only trace the dim outline of her features now; but something in her half-seen face or in her silence, or perhaps his own conscience, pricks him with reproach.

He waits a few moments, and then says,

“I didn’t mean to hurt you, Athelyn—but you can’t think this subject is very pleasant for me. Still—I oughtn’t to have been rough with you. I was a brute to say it—there!”

She turns to him instantly.

“I know—I know you didn’t mean it,” she says, in a voice that is shaken slightly. “I know you’d never mean to hurt me by word or look.”

“True,” he says, slowly, “I never would!”

They are silent for awhile, and then he says, brusquely,

“You think me a scoundrel, Athelyn, of course?”

For a moment she is about to answer “No!”—the term seems to her so inapplicable then and ever to him. But the reproachful ghost of Cressida’s face seems to look at her out of the shadows, and the moan of the winter wind seems a sigh from the past.

“It was a cruel work,” she says, sadly but steadfastly.

“Yes,” he assents, in an abstracted tone, as if he were thinking more of her than of her words. Then he takes her two hands in his; they tremble a little but do not struggle in his clasp. “And yet, Athelyn,” he says, suddenly—and dark as it is, she feels his eyes burn on her face—“do you know that, if I put forth all my influence

over you, I think—I *think* that you would marry me yet!”

If he expects her to deny it or to challenge his power, he has mistaken her nature. Truthfully as if answering in the face of Heaven, and without a quiver in her voice she answers him,

“God help me, Harold—I think I would!”

“Strange,” he says, in a gentler tone, “that in you, so fair and good, so crystal pure and clear of soul, there should lurk a mortal weakness for such a fellow as I! But I shall never avail myself of that weakness to tie your white life to mine. I would not accept the sacrifice that I think you would be angel enough to be willing to make, even now!”

“Sacrifice?” she repeats, ponderingly. “I wonder, am I weak in this? Is my love for you—*can* it be weakness, Harold? It

seems to me that it is all my nature's strength. I was vain and selfish and narrow, a weak spoilt child, before I knew you. You are not what I thought you once, and I know that you are not, now, and I can bear to face that truth. Yet still it seems to me that all I have of strength I owe to you. You taught me love! and that love that was all my joy and all my pain, is all my courage too. And can I ever forget that once—once—you promised to sacrifice your own will at my prayer? And now, that all is past and gone, I would not shrink nor fear, Harold—if you were to say 'Come!' I may dare to own this to you, for you know it well! Your influence endures; and you are conscious of your power."

He is silent awhile, not hesitating or wavering a whit, but holding her hands in a close prison, while he gazes at the

shadowy figure he knows to be so fair.

“No, my Athelyn—whom I have not the smallest right to call *mine* !” he says at last. “I shall never ask you to be my wife again ! You are too pure and good for me. And you deserve a love that I cannot give you.”

Keener than a knife these last words cut her through the heart. For a moment she turns absolutely faint with the bitter pain. Just then, all that she has ever suffered before—the anguish of parting, disillusionment, ruin of fair cloud-castles—all these things seem but dull bruises beside the sharp stab of hearing his own lips say, “A love I cannot give you !”

Yet she stands unflinching under the blow ; and only a quiver in her voice, a faint catching of the breath, betrays her as she rejoins, a little brokenly, but with a certain desperately retained calmness still,

“Did you—never—never—love me then?”

“Look here, Athelyn. If ever I loved a woman upon earth, I loved *you*! All the love of which my nature is capable I have lavished on *you*! You stand alone in your place in my heart; be sure of that. But I couldn't give you the devotion you deserve, for it is not in me to give. It's not in me to be absolutely faithful to any woman. I've been a roving nature all through life, and I shall be so till death. You are well rid of me, child!”

“So be it, Harold,” she answers, softly, quietly, but in the pause before her answer she has stifled down a deep, half sobbing sigh.

“I have wronged you too, my Athelyn. I see that now. I crossed your fair life's path and spoilt its fairest years. But you forgive me, sweet?”

“Have I anything to forgive?” she wonders, almost dreamily. “Was it a wrong to love me and leave me? I gave my love to you; you had as much right to leave it as to keep it. But if you ever wronged *me*, you were forgiven long ago!”

“That is as I would have it. Forgive me through all—love me through all. Keep me in your white soul; it is as if there was a hope of heaven for me while you love me.”

They stand in silence again for a time; his thought perhaps wandering further away afield than hers; for when he speaks again it is to say, as if the words broke from a painful reverie,

“And from you, my angel, I shall go back to my old life. My life—and yours. Why, night and day are not further apart!”

She strains her eyes to see his face in the

dusk. Then in a voice sunk almost to a whisper, yet as passionately and earnestly as she had pleaded for Cressida once, she pleads with him, and her few low words are solemn as a prayer,

“Harold, am I *utterly* powerless?”

“Powerless to change the nature born in me—yes! But, Athelyn, say once more that you forgive me all?”

“All—all!”

They are looking out through the window into the shadowy garden. All the landscape is dreary and ghostly; a white veil of snow lies thinly over lawn and field; the trees are like pale spectres waving eerie arms in the wind that wails feebly like a lost child round the house. A chill winter moon, like a crescent-shaped slip from a glacier, clear and keen as a scimitar, floats among curdling clouds that seem to be freezing from the icy black-blue of the sky.

Here and there a star peeps like a pin-point of glittering ice.

“It was summer morning then!” The words come half unconsciously, like a whisper in a dream, from Athelyn’s lips.

He makes no answer but to grasp her hand, yet she knows his thought has followed hers. In both their hearts the memory of that June morning is stinging sharply as a stab. Then life, and love, and day were dawning; then the golden east shone in their eyes with “the light that never was on land or sea.” Now the cold grasp of winter is upon them, and the sun has set.

“I must be going soon,” he says. “You will let me kiss you, Athelyn, once more? Once, do you remember,”—he draws her unresisting to his heart as he speaks—“I had no need to *ask*—in the dear old days that are dead! And now that we are part-

ing, you will lift your face and give me one of the old sweet kisses for a last sweet memory !”

She lifts her downcast face in obedience to his will, and once again Harold’s arms close round her, and Harold’s kisses seal her lips, and through her soul one thought throbs swift and strong as fire, in well-known words that from that hour, whenever she hears them, bring back that hour to her—

“If ’twere now to die,

’Twere now to be most happy !”

“Ah, love,” he whispers—“my one pure love, I ought to say ‘forget me!’ But I cannot. I feel that I could kill the man for whose sake you will put my memory aside. But he will never be first !” and his voice deepens with exultant passion. “No coming years can ever wash away from your life the hours we two have had, my purest

and my best ! My life's best hours are those hours with you ; no man can ever efface them !—no future other love wipe out the past that's mine ! You loved me *first !*"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ACADEMY PICTURES.

Along the grass sweet airs are blown,
 Our way this day in spring ;
 Of all the songs that we have known,
 Now which one shall we sing ?
 Not that, my love, ah no !
 Not this, my love !—why so ?
 Yet both were ours ; but hours will come and go !

 The branches cross above our eyes ;
 The skies are in a net,
 And what's the thing beneath the skies
 We two would most forget ?
 Not birth, my love—no, no !
 Not death, my love—no, no !
 The love once ours, but ours long hours ago !”

ROSSETTI.

AFTER this meeting and parting—which
 Destiny had brought about at Lake-
 side, as if to divert itself with a grim

mockery of the long-ago meeting and unforgotten parting there—it would be difficult to say whether Athelyn was happier or unhappier. It was a question that neither she herself nor those about her could have solved. The unsealing of the door of the locked and sealed chamber could not have been without effect, and the one thing certain was that it had shattered her barely-achieved and hardly-attained peace of mind into as many fragments as the bits of glass in a kaleidoscope.

Her meeting again with him seemed simply to wipe out of her existence the years since they had parted. Now it appeared to her almost as if she had never lived those years ; they had passed and left no trace ; there were no landmarks in her life, save where his name was written.

The most important consequence of this meeting—although it did not seem so very

important to Athelyn—was her unpromising, though gentle and kindly regretful, refusal of an offer of marriage made to her by Aubrey Heathfield—an offer which, as any other offer must have been at that time, was to her so utterly and simply impossible to accept that it cost her no struggle nor self-conflict to decline it. She was sorry he had spoken, for his sake; though there lingered in her just a little mortal and womanly weakness in the shape of vanity, which soothed her feelings, saved them from pricking her too severely on his behalf, and spread a sweet salve over the slight wounds.

Mrs. Hastings, who of course perceived what had been going on, derived but little gratification from the pleasant titillation of her maternal pride in Athelyn's conquests, this time. It was too tantalising that this fine golden apple, towards which many a

hand had been outstretched and reached in vain, should have fallen at her daughter's feet only to be gently put out of her path. Now for the first time Mrs Hastings sighed and looked regretful. She had never attempted to influence Athelyn's inclinations, and did not now ; they never spoke upon the subject ; but the girl knew that behind her mother's tender smile there lay a secret disappointment, and the knowledge cost her many a hidden burst of tears,—but no wavering.

Her grandfather perceived the current of Mrs. Hastings's thoughts, and also knew that she, who was ever softly secretive, indolent, sensitive, and shrinking from all difficulties, would not utter them. The good old gentleman thought he would assist his dear daughter-in-law, and pave the way for her, by a discreet and delicate conversation with Athelyn himself.

Accordingly, one day when Athelyn, who had been sitting in a low chair by his side reading to him, put down the paper, she quickly perceived that he was turning over and over in his mind the ways and means of opening a discussion. He gave a little nervous cough, smiled benevolently, and asked if she was cold. Athelyn kindly helped him out of his difficulty.

“What are you thinking of, dear?” she asked, looking straight up in his face. “You have something to say to me, haven’t you?”

Mr. Hastings availed himself of this opening. “I have never interfered with you, my child, have I?” he began, in his kind voice, a little hesitatingly still. “Your life is in your own hands, and you steer it for yourself, where you will. But one question I should like to ask you—Do you never mean to marry?”

"Fate will settle that for me."

"But it seems to me that you are acting on a resolve that Fate shall only settle it one way," he said, smiling, but half sadly. "Is it that you really wish to live single, my dear?"

"I *don't* wish it," she answered, frankly. "Did any woman ever *wish* to live a lonely life? Was ever a woman yet whose ideal of happiness was not a happy marriage?"

"Then why, my child, do you not marry? Mind, I don't wish to take the responsibility of advising you; but you remember the fable? Many a woman who is too hard to please, picks up the crooked stick at last!"

"Dear grandpapa, if the field is *all* crooked sticks, is one not wisest to refuse to pick up any? And could there well be a more misshapen crooked stick than a marriage wherein one would be hampered by a

constant sense of failure—the most torturing of failures, the inability to pay the love you owe?”

“Do you think, my child, that women cannot learn to love what is love-worthy?”

“I think they can; I am sure they can—if the field is free for love to grow,” she said, very calmly. “That is a generality, but, like most generalities, it is personally applicable.”

They were silent for a few minutes; then she continued, drawing a little closer to his side,

“Look here, dear grandpapa, I know well that you only wish my happiness. Could I be happy owing a debt I am powerless to pay? perjured by the utterance of solemn promises of love I *could not* keep? The past is past; the future I leave to shape itself. I cannot say what the future may bring. The present time only I can answer

for; and, at the present time, for me to lead any man to think that he had a chance of winning love from me would be simply to delude and deceive him. So let me stay with you and darling mother, at home, and be as I have always been."

"You have always been our comfort and our blessing; we wish for nothing better than that you should stay and be so still. It is not that it would not leave us desolate to part with you, my child; you know that?"

"I think so," she said, softly.

"But I am old, my little girl," he resumed, tenderly. "I cannot hope for a much longer span of life to be allotted to me. And when I die, you and my poor Alice—Alice who is neither so young nor so strong as you are—will be alone."

"Not alone, dear. Heaven is above; and earth is full of kindness and goodness."

His failing eyes were yet clear enough to read the mingled sweetness and strength of the delicate young face.

“You are a thorough Hastings!” he said, with only apparent irrelevance. “Act as you will, my child; carve your own life. I think your father will never have reason to be other than proud of you.”

They said no more on this subject, then nor ever; but thenceforth the old man understood his grandchild well.

“I have been having a talk with grand-papa,” Athelyn said to her mother, drawing a cushion to sit down at her feet. “And now, mother sweet, I’ll have one with you.”

The end of the talk was that Mrs. Hastings wept and said she would rather die than her Athelyn should marry without the blessing of mutual love—just yet; but there was time before her.

They had done with the subject, but

Athelyn had one word more to say—the only word before which she hesitated and lingered. At last she said it, with searching eyes that pleaded for the answer she wished—

“Mamma darling, tell me—tell me that in your heart you bear no resentment against *him*?”

“None—none,” Mrs. Hastings assured her warmly, for the moment recollecting only Harold’s winning smile and deferential gaze, and really deluding herself into the idea that he was an amiable and misrepresented hero. Then on second thoughts she added, “Sometimes I feel as if I *ought*——”

“But you don’t? you don’t really?” urged the girl.

“No, my darling, no.”

Mrs. Hastings spoke truly enough.

For women are oddly constituted. As a rule, they will forgive a bad man all, and a

good man nothing. Perhaps after all it is the acute logic of the feminine mind that moves them in this distribution of their justice. They will deal large mercy to the sinner in whom a sin does not appear an inconsistency, but have small charity for the one error that appears out of place in the saint.

Soon after this conversation between Athelyn and her mother, they happened to meet Harold Parkhurst by chance once and again, and though these mere brief and casual encounters afforded no opportunity for more than an exchange of greeting, yet they broke the ice of silence between Athelyn's mother and her former lover. The first time was when they were coming out of a theatre. In the crowded lobby, where they were making inch by inch slow progress towards the goal, they found themselves suddenly close to Mr. Parkhurst, and so

hemmed in by the crowd that it would have been an impossibility to avoid recognition without inflicting the cut direct.

He greeted them with just the old winning, tranquil smile, and when Mrs. Hastings, colouring and embarrassed, half hesitatingly held out her hand, he took it with just the old courteous grace that had charmed her in the past—that charmed always the more from its contrast with his frequent brusquerie.

The second time that the whirl of London life—that is ever uniting and separating its atoms with kaleidoscopic rapidity—threw them together, it was at a concert; he was with a lady, and they only exchanged bows and smiles, although he was sitting sufficiently within their range of view for them to catch occasional glimpses of him and of his companion. These accidental *rencontres* seemed to Athelyn to strike the keynote of

all the possible future intercourse between them. They were now acquaintances—society acquaintances who bowed and smiled and passed. There was to be no estrangement between them, and no friendship. She smiled with a bitter amusement as she thought how naturally this came about, and reflected, with an odd mingling of thankfulness and dissatisfaction, that their London “sets” were sufficiently separate—although the circles touched now and then—for the occasions on which he would be called upon to bow and make way for her on the crowded staircase, or offer the attention of fetching an ice, to be few and far between.

Although the acquaintance of the Hastings in the world of Art was limited, yet, when the season came that sets the artistic hive buzzing, there were a fair collection of cards on their table from artists old and young, great and small (the majority cer-

tainly of the latter), informing them, in terms more or less modest, and type more or less conspicuous, that on a given day the senders "requested the honour of a visit to view their pictures," or that "So-and-so's Academy Pictures would be on view."

Amongst them was a card from Harold Parkhurst.

Concerning this Mrs. Hastings hesitated, and referred to Athelyn. Athelyn paused, deliberated, and finally decided that they would not go. Yet, as the day drew near, she began to feel restless, and thought that it would be well to form some other engagement for that day, with the double motive of distracting her attention and putting it out of her power to change her mind. Accordingly she accepted an invitation from Mrs. Bristowe, a widow lady, with whom they had recently become acquainted, and who had more than once invited Athe-

lyn to spend the day and drive with her. Athelyn liked Mrs. Bristowe, who was yet in the prime of life—handsome and careworn, clever and sometimes caustic—a woman who looked as if she had a story; and she in her turn had taken a great fancy to Athelyn, was delighted to have her for the day, and observed, in course of her greeting,

“I am so glad you fixed to-day, my dear, for we shall have a nice drive. We are going round to the studios—or at least as many as we can manage. I have so many cards, we shall never be able to do them all.”

Athelyn resigned herself to the Fates, perhaps not too reluctantly, and took her place in the carriage with Mrs. Bristowe and two other young ladies who were also to share in the pleasure of the studio-round, one of whom was critical and technical, the

other *ingénue* and parading her innocence in sweet simplicity.

They drove to studio after studio ; saw and criticised essays in high art and low art, classic works and pot-boilers, landscapes sunny and landscapes sombre, scenes historical, scenes domestic, and scenes sentimental, and paid their compliments to artists on every rung of the ladder of Fame. At last they arrived at an old-fashioned-looking house *à propos* of which Mrs. Bristowe observed,

“Here we are at Parkhurst’s ! I understand he has something very good this year.”

Athelyn drew a long breath as she set foot on the threshold. How often she had longed to see this London studio of Harold’s ! how little she had thought it would be thus, as a stranger among strangers, that she should see it at last !

They went up some steps, down some steps, through a dimly-lighted passage, across a bare chilly carpetless room along one of whose walls stood a row of busts and statues on high pedestals—and which, save for two chairs and a bench, was otherwise unfurnished—and came to a curtained glass door, which stood ajar, and from the other side of which sounded a buzz of many voices. This led them into the studio.

A stuffed wolf kept guard at the door, with grinning teeth and glassy gleaming eyes. In one corner stood a lay-figure whose battered and paintless countenance was screened by a Spanish mantilla, and crowned with a Turkish fez; in another corner was a figure in complete armour, visor down and gauntlet on hand. On the wall behind this interesting object hung a collection of weapons, from the “twisted

Malay's creese" to the flint-lock musket, and, hard by that, a collection of pipes. Heavy curtains of rich tapestry were looped up from the windows, the top panes of one of which were of various coloured stained glass. There was a skylight also partially screened by striped curtains shot with crimson and gold. About the whole place there was a certain aspect of almost barbaric luxuriance—a prevalence of warm and mellow colouring—an abundance of everything likely or unlikely to be available as a study. Beside a broad low couch strewn with furs stood a low oaken table with an antique lamp, a bronze dragon, and a skull mounted in silver. There was the very mahogany easel Athelyn had known of old; and of course pictures everywhere, pictures prominent and pictures pushed out of the way, pictures framed and unframed, pictures in disgrace with their faces to the wall, and on

the centre easel, the chief canvas that was "on view."

There were a crowd of people in the studio; as Mrs. Bristowe entered with her party, some fell back and made way for the ladies, while some came forward to claim acquaintance; but they did not immediately catch sight of Harold Parkhurst, round whom an animated group were buzzing. Most of those present were strangers to Athelyn, though she caught sight of one or two familiar figures as she followed in Mrs. Bristowe's wake with the step of a queen; her proud head held high, and no flush on her cold and tranquil face.

Harold turned and saw the new arrivals, and extricating himself with his usual promptness from the entanglements of an admiring group, came quickly across to greet them. He was looking his best, with a touch of warmth and colour on his dark

sallow cheek, a smiling light in his eye, for success and admiration were as the wine of life to him. As he saw Athelyn his face lit up for a second with a new gladness, yet not so warm or so marked as to attract any attention; indeed if there was anything noticeable in the manner of his welcome to her it was its extreme deference and half distant courtesy.

Mrs. Bristowe passed on to look at the principal object of attraction on the centre easel, while Athelyn lingered before a smaller picture—a fragment of the interior of a church, with a golden-haired child asleep on the altar-steps in the full flood of purple and amber light that poured down from the oriel window.

She stood silently admiring this, and listening with half amused interest to the various remarks she overheard made by the other lookers-on.

“Good rich bit of colouring,” laconically observed a young man with an eye-glass, a bright blue tie, and long fair hair, drawing back to survey the general effect with his head on one side.

“The face of a little cherub!” exclaimed a matron, intent on the presentment of the child.

“His *tone* is generally good,” remarked one of Mrs. Bristowe’s young friends, loftily.

“Where, oh where, did he get that divine light—that exquisite golden tint?” gushed a more enthusiastic young lady.

“That’s the pane,” replied the young man practically, indicating a yellow square in the window. “Shuts up the skylight, and only lets the light in there—don’t you see?”

There were plenty of observations flying round in Athelyn’s hearing about the other and larger picture also, as the two groups

round the two easels were close together and melting into each other.

“What is it?”

“St. Catherine of Siena.”

“It might as well be anything else.”

“Daring, isn’t it, to challenge comparison with the St. Catherine in the Louvre?”

“The treatment so utterly different.”

“Parkhurst, you’ll go down to posterity as the painter of fair women!”

“I say, Parkhurst, what are you going to call it?”

“I think I shall put only just the words,

‘Ricorditi da me che son
La Pia!’ ”

“No need for her to remind people to remember her if she had a face like that,” observed a handsome young fellow, who could not possibly have been anything in the world but an artist.

“No !” agreed Mr. Parkhurst, with an odd smile.

The other speaker turned, and his eye fell by chance on Athelyn, rested on her—as artists’ eyes generally did—for a moment in simple approbation, then fixed with a sort of puzzled half-startled recognition, and he glanced quickly from her to the picture. Then suddenly Athelyn perceived that Mrs. Bristowe had turned and was looking at her, and felt instinctively that other eyes too had sought her face. She moved quietly to Mrs. Bristowe’s side and stood before the St. Catherine—face to face with her idealised and altered but still most recognisable self.

He had changed here and there a line or dimple ; darkened the eyes ; brightened the hair to burnished gold ; shed round the head an aureole of wonderful light like that of a golden dawn ; hallowed the whole fair

face with an expression marvellous in its noble and rapt serenity—a very passion of peace and purity. Still it was herself, not as she was, but as in a dream he might see her, in all the infinite tenderness of earth and matchless glory of angelic peace, look down on him from heaven.

She looked on it, and the colour rose in cheek; her heart swelled; she seemed to grow taller; and suddenly conscious of the looks around her, she drooped the veiling lashes over her eyes that glowed with a sort of rapture. He had deemed her worthy of this! In his highest ideal it was *her* face that had come before him. The likeness was sufficiently strong to strike at once everyone who looked intently at Athelyn; but scarcely so remarkable as to make her at all embarrassingly conspicuous. To a mere passing stranger's glance the resemblance between the bright-haired, white-

robed, immortally lovely St. Catherine and the tall dark-haired girl in the black velvet dress and shady hat, might or might not have been instantly evident.

Harold glanced at her curiously, wondering if she perceived it. Her heightened colour and an undefinable look of forced calm told him at once.

“Do you like it, Miss Hastings?” he said formally, courteously.

“Lovely colouring,” she observed, desperately seeking a safe common-place that should not too warmly praise the picture so like herself.

“Too large, my dear fellow, too large!” said a Job’s comforter, shaking his head as he thrust in his word. “You shouldn’t cover so much canvas if you want to get in. Now, if it were smaller——!” Then he too suddenly peered inquisitively under the brim of Athelyn’s hat.

Somewhat embarrassed, and yet not painfully so, she made her way slowly among the various groups towards a corner where she had caught a glimpse of a copy of the "Heloise"—a copy so exact that at first she fancied it was that well-remembered picture itself. She smiled, though sadly, as she gazed at it. What a flood of memories it let loose—the grey melancholy trees, the dusky convent walls in the cold autumnal moonlight! Those mournful eyes of Heloise looked at her as they had looked in the happy time. Only now she understood them better, their passionless pain—their immortal love soaring beyond joy and hope and beyond death itself.

"You know this picture?" Harold said, in an agreeably conversational tone.

"Yes."

"Do you know it?" said Mrs. Bristowe, looking at her with some interest. "I

know it too, very well. It's one of the best things you have done, I think," she added to Mr. Parkhurst, most courteously, but with a certain faint and scarcely perceptible aroma of unintentional meaning and something the reverse of approbation in her tone.

"What's this?" inquired a handsome girl in a severely pre-Raphaelite dress the colour of autumn leaves, pulling forward an unframed picture which had been leaning with its face to the wall.

"Only an unfinished study," he replied, and Athelyn felt that he involuntarily glanced at her for a second as he spoke, while a slight constraint in his tone, that no ear but hers could have detected, betrayed to her that he was not altogether delighted by the young lady's inquisitiveness.

She however had turned the picture round by this time; she was evidently on free and familiar terms in the studio; and

had no intention of letting him escape.

“I say, Harold!” she called, with a confident *bon camaraderie*, as he seemed about to move away with Athelyn, “who is it? come and tell us! It’s rather like little Susie Morley, only prettier. Just the face I want for my ‘Perdita.’ Would she give me a sitting?”

“I don’t know her address, else I dare-say she might,” he said, indifferently.

“Ah, you like to keep your models to yourself!” laughed his fair friend.

Athelyn looked at the picture; she guessed before she saw it that it must be Cressida—else why should he have glanced at her? And it was Cressida—Cressida fair and fresh as dewy morning, in a white dress, with poppies and field-flowers in her hands, and the sunshine on her bright blonde hair.

“Why don’t you finish it?” demanded the young lady; “it’s too pretty to be lost.

What a sweet, innocent, happy face ! isn't it?" sociably appealing to Athelyn, as she stood near.

Athelyn winced, and a look of pain clouded her eyes. Yet her lips smiled, and there was no bitterness perceptible in the smile as she agreed in cool equable accents,

"Yes. An innocent, happy face !"

"Certainly, Harold, it's one of your specialities to seize the spirit of a face !" the other continued, candidly, still fixing a critical gaze on Cressida's presentment.

"But I think you shine most in portraying such expressions as the 'Heloise;' you seem more in your element there."

"Do I?" he responded, quietly, with an under-glance from his secretive dark eyes.

"What do you think, Miss Hastings?"

"You appear to me very successful in portraying both phases," Athelyn said, somewhat coldly and reticently, her manner

utterly rejecting the challenge to enter into, or dilate upon, the subject.

Then Mrs. Bristowe began to collect her party to take leave, and as she appeared to know many of the circle there assembled, there was a good deal of hand-shaking and leave-taking to go through. Under cover of a chorus of "Good-byes" and "See you soon," Harold said, in a quick undertone to Athelyn,

"Are you angry at the St. Catherine? I could not help it; your face came between me and the canvas. Tell me—you are not annoyed? Was it a liberty to take your features?—if so, it was your face's fault for haunting me—not mine. And you don't mind, do you?"

"No, I don't mind," she whispered, and as she looked in his face her eyes said far more. They looked at him with a sort of joyous pride and exaltation flashing through

their sadness, as if across the gulf that he himself had inexorably set between them, they caught the shining of the unextinguishable glory of the past.

Several glances were turned admiringly on Athelyn as she followed her chaperon of the day through the door which Harold held open for them. She had not studied "How to enter and quit an apartment" in the Deportment Class at school; but she was one of the women who have the natural gift of making entrances and exits with an innate and inimitable stately grace that no amount of drilling can even feebly emulate. There was a certain royalty about her step—a self-possession utterly devoid of self-consciousness in her carriage—beyond the power of practice to instil.

Harold knew, and liked knowing, that the admiration of some of his colleagues was following her. But she was alike

ignorant of and indifferent to it as she turned one farewell look on his face ; and his deep, dark eyes softened and fixed on hers as if her beauty was still the dearest sight the world could hold for him.

If we knew when we bend our last look on the face we love—if only some intuition made us aware that those eyes should smile into ours no more, how should we ever tear that parting look away ? Should we not fling all the world aside to strain the loved heart to our heart again, and gaze—and gaze—until Death sealed the meeting eyes ?

CHAPTER IX.

THE STORY OF THE HELOISE.

Yes, earth—yes, mere ignoble earth,
 Now do I misstate—mistake ?
 Do I wrong your weakness and call it worth,
 Seal my sense up for your sake ?
 O love !—no, love !—not so, indeed !
 You were just weak earth, I knew,
 With much in you waste, with many a weed,
 And plenty of passions run to seed—
 But a little good grain too !

ROBERT BROWNING.

“ I DID not know you knew Mr. Parkhurst ?” said Mrs. Bristowe, suddenly and interrogatively.

The studio visits were over ; so was

dinner; and Athelyn and her hostess were enjoying a post-prandial *tête-à-tête*.

Mrs. Bristowe's remark broke a silence so abruptly, and she had till then so totally ignored the subject, that Athelyn coloured a little as she answered—

“Yes; we have known him some time.”

“Did you sit for the St. Catherine?”

“Oh, no; I was never more surprised!” she answered, colouring deeper. “Did you think it like me, then?”

“No one who knew you could have failed to observe it.”

“He took a little sketch of me once,” Athelyn admitted, very coolly and leisurely. “I suppose—that must have given him the idea——”

“Of presenting you as a saint? his favourite saint too. I have often heard him poetise about ‘La Pia.’ Do you like him?”

This was a posing question; however,

there were very few occasions to which Athelyn was not equal.

“Yes; I think I may say I like him,” she answered, calmly. “Do *you*?”

“No !” Mrs. Bristowe replied, promptly. “I admit there’s a fascination about the man, but I don’t like him. There’s something insidious and cruel about him; he’s like a sleek black panther. He has done more damage in the world than he can ever undo; and the worst of it is, that he has certain good qualities that make him all the more dangerous. He is the very reverse of that poor deluded Mariana’s idea of masculine character, as represented in Angelo; he

‘ becomes more bad
Through being a little good ! ’ ”

“Is not that paradoxical?” inquired Athelyn, deeply interested in Mrs. Bristowe’s opinion of Harold, but withal cautiously desirous of escaping into generalities.

“Paradox is truth, my dear,” Mrs. Bristowe responded. “If Parkhurst had no redeeming points, good and true women would be safe from him; he would be simply repellent to them. As it is, he is the more dangerous for the glimmering of possible good in him. When you see a shining light through the darkness at sea, you know it is to warn you off the breakers. But as a rule when women, poor moths! see a bright spot shining in a dark nature, instead of taking it as a signal to warn them of danger they steer straight for it, and dash themselves on the rocks.”

“You must know him very well to speak so surely and so strongly,” Athelyn said.

“I don’t know him *personally* very well; but he’s a study, and I’ve watched a good deal of his career. I don’t wish to speak too strongly; there are worse men than he, though few I think more mischievous, in

deed if not in intention. Certainly there are some excuses to be made for him. His start in life was bad; his mother died broken-hearted, I believe—that was a sad story altogether! she was an ill-used woman, poor thing! And he fell into bad hands early. I don't suppose there ever was a worse woman than Mrs. Sebastiani. Of course you never heard of her, my dear; all that scandal must have been before your time. She was a dozen years older than he, and it was about as bad a school as possible for a young man to take his first lesson in. A bad woman's influence, if only for a season, is the ruin for life of many a man."

"Cannot a good woman's influence redeem them from such ruin?"

"My dear child, that is the first stage of feminine credulity. The second regards it as a case of 'Pull Devil—Pull Baker!'

In the third we realise that Devil always pulls hardest—the powers of Evil are stronger than the powers of Good in all the world, as well as in the man we're discussing."

"You think so very badly of him, then?"

"I judge him hardly when I recollect one piece of work of his doing that I had under my eyes. Yet I suppose in the court of conscience—if he has a conscience—he pleads that he meant no harm."

"Is it anything secret? or are you at liberty to tell me about it?" Athelyn asked.

"Oh, no secret, and it's not much of a story either—not worth telling; it was only the sight of that picture to-day that put it into my head."

"What picture?" inquired Athelyn, looking up quickly, wondering—Could the story of Cressida in any shape have reached Mrs. Bristowe's ears?

“The ‘Heloise’—the one you said you knew.”

“Oh, the Heloise?” Athelyn drew a light breath of relief, yet looked up in perplexed inquiry. “It is the Heloise you mean?”

“Yes; what other were you thinking of? I daresay there’s a similar history attached to most of his pictures, if we only knew the secrets of the studio.”

“Well—what of the Heloise?”

“Well, not much. Only I used once to go for change of air and stay at an old farmhouse in Surrey—a lovely old-fashioned place in a valley that was a perfect nest of beauty. Of course he happened to find it out, and went there too—he was never there while I was there, but I used to hear about him. And of course there was a daughter—as good and sweet a little girl as ever lived, but unluckily for herself she was very pretty—more than pretty indeed, as

you can imagine when you know that she sat for 'Heloise.' She was fairly educated too, and there was a poetic touch about her. I knew her in her happy days, when Parkhurst had come and gone, and had got up a mild flirtation with her as a matter of course—but nothing that touched her very deeply then—at least, I think not; but it's hard to define when and how the seed is sown.

“There was a handsome sailor-cousin who was desperately in love with Jenny; the old folks were very fond of him, and it was the dream of their lives that Jack was to marry Jenny, and have a share in the farm, and some day give up the sea and live there with them. I used to watch the courtship—Jack, with his big sunburnt hands and his tanned face, looking as if Jenny were the rarest flower in the garden. How he loved her, poor boy!—and Jenny—well, I am sure she was very fond of him, and thought

there was nobody in the world so good as Jack. So they were married ; I gave Jenny her wedding-dress, and a prettier bride I never wish to see—and poor Jack ! I've never forgotten his proud happy face, and the rose as big as a cabbage in his button-hole to do honour to the day ! After that I did not see Jenny for two years."

" Well ?"

" Well, it appeared that the young people were as happy as turtle-doves with the old people at the farm for a few months. Then Jack went away to sea ; and when he had been gone some time, Parkhurst came again to the farm. He had not seen Jenny since her engagement ; he had sent her a wedding-present, I remember. I don't suppose he had troubled himself much about her before, but now he saw her married and happy, and her husband away—— Doesn't the story tell itself from that point ?"

“But you tell me too, please,” said Athelyn, in a subdued voice, as she sat leaning her cheek upon her hand.

“I don’t *know* much to tell. I can only guess. I know that his stay at the farm was cut short by a broad hint from the old farmer, who began to think at last, poor blind old fellow ! that his presence was not altogether well for Jenny. I know that after that he stayed on in the neighbourhood for a little while, and then he went, and was heard of no more. And I know how when I saw Jenny again I could scarcely recognise the girl I had left a blooming happy bride. She was a ghost—a wreck of herself; she was beautiful still, for her features were like a statue’s, but every gleam of youth and brightness was withered up out of her. And over all the old home I had known so happy there was a cloud—and Parkhurst’s name, once a

familiar word, was a forbidden thing there.”

“Is that all?”

“Nearly all; not quite. I was very sorry for poor Jenny, but there was nothing to be done but to try to cheer her, and trust she might forget in time—as far as one can forget—whatever had to be forgotten, and that when Jack came home, her heart would turn again to him, and he might never know the story of his absence. Well, Jack never came home; his ship was in one of the long list of ‘Lost at sea!’ They say the news nearly killed Jenny, but I know that what struck her down was not so much the grief of his loss as the remorse that she could not grieve with all her heart. For that she could not do! When she was free—when Parkhurst might lawfully offer her his love, she thought—poor foolish girl!—that he would return to her. How she hated herself for that thought—how she was torn

with remorse and grief—how she tried to mourn, with all her soul, for her husband, and wrench her thoughts away from that other man, I don't suppose anyone can *know*; but I used to guess a great deal of her struggles. I think she knew that I understood her, for she used to seek me out and sit by me as dumb as an animal in pain.

“Well, she waited—and grieved—and suspense, and remorse, and sorrow killed her at last—killed her just as surely as if he had poured prussic acid into her cup. I don't know what the doctors called it, but that girl died simply and solely of a broken heart. And towards the last her silence broke down, and she used to cry and call for him—Wasn't he coming? Wouldn't he ever come? She had wronged the truest heart that ever was, for *him*; the thought of her own sin was killing her, and

would he let her die alone? My liking for poor Jenny was only liking; she was nothing much to me, but it gives me an uncomfortable feeling still to remember her feverish watching of the door—her starting at every sound of wheels. I don't like to think of the last look on her wasted face—the last words her poor, pale lips uttered."

"Did—they—not write to him?" Athelyn asked, almost under her breath.

"They told him she was very ill, and she thought, I fancy, that would be enough to bring him to her side. I believe he wrote a polite letter of condolence—that was all the sign he ever made; I suppose he had too many other games to be played out to waste his feeling on that one victim. It was just before he went to India, I remember; he went with the burden of that poor girl's broken heart and early grave on his soul, but he seemed to thrive under the

weight, for I believe it was a very successful tour."

Athelyn shrank into herself with a shuddering pain as she thought of that time—just before he went to India—the happy days when he loved her first! Had she then—she, so all unconscious and innocent, bought her happiness at the price of the very life of another woman who loved him too?

"She sat for the Heloise?" she said, presently, as a new thought struck her, but it was with difficulty she could control her voice to speak.

"Not for that itself, but for a study that he afterwards amplified and worked out—when she was in her grave. I don't know whether he saw that look upon her face when he left her, if not, it's very creditable to his imagination."

Athelyn remembered his working at that

picture at Monksfield, his refusing to let her sit for it, the words they had said that day. It all came back to her in burning pain. She could not trust herself to frame a word; her eyes were blind with tears. Her face, bent on her hand, was happily hidden from the view of Mrs. Bristowe, who, after a little pause, continued, in a lighter tone,

“That is the full, true and particular history of the model of the ‘Heloise.’ Probably every one of his pictures has very much the same kind of story. Who was the great painter who stabbed his model to study the workings of the muscles? Whoever he was, he flourishes in these modern times, my dear; he is often an artist still, and when he isn’t an artist, he’s generally a poet. Now-a-days he doesn’t shed blood; but I don’t know that his studies are so very much more merciful. We don’t care to see representation of physical suffering—

it's too repulsive and realistic for our nerves ; but mental agony—that's only 'copy' for the author, a 'subject' for the artist."

Athelyn managed surreptitiously to brush away the tell-tale tears that hung heavily on her lashes, and modulated her voice to frame some observation calculated to shunt the discussion from Harold Parkhurst's sins in particular to the meretricious tendencies of the age in general—a task the more easily achieved because it was to Mrs. Bristowe so congenial a subject that she was both willing and able to take all the burden of the disquisition on herself.

Athelyn went home heavy-hearted.

"I was glad to-day!" she said to herself. "Yes, I was very, very glad that it was my face he chose! But not even that gladness is left me unalloyed. It is all, all mixed with bitterness. In even the memory of

my happiest days there's a thorn set. Am I to have no one memory of sweetness left without a sting? Why did she tell me that poor girl's story to-day? Yet what right have *I* to murmur—I the one woman who has no cause to reproach him—I to whom he has ever been good, though he could not be true! Oh, poor Jenny! Poor sister of mine, who loved as I have loved, and suffered so far more than I have ever suffered! Can he rest—does no shadow haunt his peace—while you are in your grave, and she, my poor lost Cressida, if still she lives, is wandering heaven knows where on earth? What other ghosts are on his track, I wonder? What other weight of ruin on his soul? And yet—how bright and prosperous he looked to-day!”

Then something whispered in her woman's heart,

“ Did he ever *love* those others?”

And one thought arose, stronger even than all bitterness, surged like a strong sea irresistible over all other waves of feeling, in the echo of his words,

“ If ever I loved mortal woman, I loved you! You stand alone in my heart; be sure of that !”

The spring wore on. There was no St. Catherine in the Academy on the important first Monday in May. When the news was gossiped around that Parkhurst's great picture was rejected and he had gone abroad, Athelyn could scarcely have felt more indignant with the entire institution of Burlington House, or have stored up a greater grudge against the Hanging Committee, if the long-ago plans had ripened to completion, and she had had a lawful right to take to heart his failures and his success.

That season brought another change into Athelyn's life. As the early summer advanced, her grandfather failed and sank. His decay was very peaceful ; after a long calm day the night closed tranquilly. Dying, he clung more than ever to his daughter-in-law, and was ever muttering about "Alice," as in the days when Edgar Hastings brought home his bride.

"I shall tell my boy," he said, one of the last times he spoke, "that you have been the best of daughters to me."

Yet it was to Athelyn he left all his instructions—to her that he turned towards the last, and panted out, looking at her sobbing mother,

"You—take—care of my poor Alice !"

And Athelyn did.

By Mr. Hastings's death, these two suffered no worldly loss. Indeed, as all that it was in his power to dispose of by will was left

to them, including the London house, they found themselves pecuniarily in a better position than before. But in their mutual sorrow neither of them gave this a consideration.

Only Athelyn turned, as in grief or in joy she would ever turn, to the memory of Harold; and when Mrs. Hastings said, tearfully,

“We are alone now in the world, my darling. There’s no one to care for us—no one for us to lean on any more!” she sighed, and thought,

“If Harold had not failed us, we should have had a strong life at our side this day. We should have been a triple-twisted cord still, strong enough to stand the strain of the roughest storm. But even if he knew—if he heard—he would not come to me now. He will never cross the gulf between us—never! And I—ah, I have called to

him, have reached my hand to him often enough! We *are* alone, we two! for ever now!"

CHAPTER X.

AFTER MANY DAYS.

Moi seule je la revois, telle que la pensée,
 Dans l'âme où rien ne meurt, vivante l'a laissée.

LAMARTINE.

“OHNE Hast, ohne Rast,” the sands of the seasons fell on steadily as old Time turned the glass. The wheel of the year brought winter round again: It was night in London.

“A beautiful night,” was Athelyn’s original observation as she looked up at the deep purple heavens where a great white moon was riding triumphant over a field of fallen clouds. The sharp ring of the horses’

feet on the road, the diamond glitter of the stars, betokened frost; but it was such a clear bright frost as only braces and invigorates fresh young blood.

“We will walk part of the way,” said Athelyn, who was fond of walking, and was luxuriously wrapped up in sealskin and sable.

The doorstep from the vantage-ground of which she was surveying the weather and making this decision was not her own; it was at some distance from her home, whither she was about to return, after spending the evening with Mrs. Bristowe. She was surrounded by an *empressé* group of two artists and a musician, each one of whom was anxious to seek a cab for, or offer his services as escort to, the beautiful Miss Hastings, and all of whom were more or less disappointed to find that the highly respectable elderly female servant who had

come to fetch "her young lady" rendered their attentions unnecessary.

Jenkinson regarded the homage which surrounded Athelyn complacently, as a reflective triumph, but turned a stern and sour glance on one gentleman whose eye she had caught, and who, as she instinctively guessed, had been aside to another bachelor, alluding to her in disrespectful terms. "The dragon" had been his expression. Jenkinson had not heard it, but knew very well it was something disrespectful.

Athelyn adhered to her resolution of walking a portion of the way; and after lingering a little longer than Jenkinson, who was cold and did not like standing, deemed quite necessary, over a trio of good nights, she set off under the chaperonage of the dragon.

Athelyn was light-hearted and in gay spirits. She had had a pleasant and triumph-

ant evening, had been a centre of attraction, and had attentions more sincere and satisfactory than idle compliments lavished upon her; and although one has been crossed in love, one must laugh and be happy sometimes. She was still wearing black—becomingly relieved with mauve and ruffled with white—for her grandfather, whom she had sincerely loved; but the days of her sorrow were past; there is no winter but softens at last into spring; and though the shadow of her lost love hung ever over her, and in her future she still saw no faint and far star rising whose light might comfort her for the extinguished sun—yet all the poignancy of love's pain was past—or so she thought, as she had thought before and been undeceived. So now she dreamt again, unwitting or forgetting that while in our love there lingers one faintest pulse of life, while one feeblest glimmer reddens the ashes still,

so long is pain of the cruellest—and rapture of the keenest—close at the door of life, to knock at any hour.

The white winter moon was riding high over the house-tops, shaming the yellow lamps of the London street with its cool chaste beauty. Country and summer have not the monopoly of beauty; the eye that seeks it can find it as well in the wintry sky that overhangs the smoke-stained city. Athelyn, who had still the happy child-like gift of extracting beauty from the curve of a broken barren branch, and pleasure from the discovery of the hole of a harvest-mouse, enjoyed the walk through the busy lighted streets. They turned down one of the roads that intersect the great highways of traffic, where there were, as usual at that hour, a few shops open, a good many shut, and several public-houses within eye-shot all ablaze with light. Of course there were

more carts than cabs rattling by; on one side of the way there was a hot-chestnut stall with its cheerful red brazier; on the other there was a shabby woman sitting huddled up on a door step, and a policeman stopping to cast a scrutinising look on her and speak a few words to her, probably a suggestion that she should "move on."

A common sight enough in London streets; and Athelyn might scarcely have even noticed it as she passed, but it happened that just as she drew near, the shabby huddled figure on the doorstep, who had not lifted her head nor answered at the policeman's first words, looked up at his repeated address. The street-lamp opposite shed its feeble yellow rays straight upon her face; and Athelyn started with a shock of incredulous amazement—rather startled than impressed, as one who sees in the crowd

a line-for-line living likeness of the face over which he saw the coffin closed.

For one moment she stared in absolute unrecognition, yet strangely struck, on the woman's pitiable sordid figure and upturned face. That haggard face, a wretched wreck of a womanhood that possibly once was fair, with nothing of youth left in its pale sunken outlines, was as a stranger's face to her. But the eyes—those hollow eyes that seemed unnaturally large in the thin wasted face—surely she had known those eyes in other days! Yet, looking out from under those careworn brows with a look wild and sullen as a caged animal's, those eyes could not—could *not* be Cressida's!

The next moment they turned towards Athelyn and met her look. Then there was no longer a doubt, no more a hope that it could not be she. In mutual and instant recognition now the two stared upon

each other, and no looker-on could have decided in which gaze was the most utter horror and dismay. Then with one hurried movement Cressida drew her ragged shawl over her head and hid her face in silence as the policeman, not noticing the lady who was pausing by them with such a look of interest, addressed her again.

“*Cressida!*” Athelyn said, in a low and shaken voice, drawing nearer to the girl—to the extreme horror and astonishment of Jenkinson—“Cressida, look up!”

The policeman cast a critical surprised glance at Athelyn.

“You know her, ma’am?”

“I recognise her, I think. Is it—is it not Cressida?”

“Look up when the lady speaks to you!” urged the guardian of the peace.

Suddenly, and with an angry impatience, she raised her head and dashed the shawl

aside, and again her look and Athelyn's met—the one in a sort of sullen, defiant shame, the other in an unutterable sorrow.

“I'm doing no harm; why can't I sit here? I'm tired—do let me be,” she said, addressing the policeman and totally ignoring Athelyn's presence. Her voice, hoarse and weak, and sharp as it seemed with pain past or present, Athelyn would scarcely have known again.

All this had passed in a minute or so, but already two or three passers-by were pausing to look on.

“Miss Athelyn,” whispered Jenkinson, remonstratingly, “do you know this young woman?”

“Yes,” she answered, quietly, and even more quietly asked, “Cressida, don't you know me?”

“No, I don't know you,” Cressida said,

trying to meet her look boldly, but with uneasy, receding eyes.

“Some mistake, ma’am?” suggested the policeman.

Athelyn looked up and saw a group collecting on the pavement, all of them surveying her and Cressida with interest. She realised the position with a burning blush that seemed to scorch her cheek, remembered that the time was night, the place a busy London street, and her fellow-actors in the scene a policeman and a shabbily-clad woman sitting on a doorstep. It did not need Jenkinson’s horror-stricken whisper, “Miss Athelyn, there’ll be a crowd!” to convey the full embarrassment of the situation to her; but she collected her energies to reply calmly to the policeman’s question,

“No, there’s no mistake.”

“Come, get up and speak to the lady,”

he urged, becoming impatient and laying his hand, though not unkindly, on the girl's shoulder.

"Has she been drinking?" whispered one of the bystanders.

Cressida heard the whisper, and shot one flashing glance rather of scorn and defiance than of shame at the speaker.

"What's up?" inquired another individual—a man shouldering to the front of the circle.

"Pray come away, Miss Athelyn! what ever would your ma say?" entreated Jenkinson, in an agony of mind.

Athelyn stood now, as she had stood before, between all the shrinking delicacy of her nature and her training, and all the impulse of courage and the principle of strength. Now again she could only be true to her noblest self at the cost of the

defiance of the conventions in which she had been nurtured. For one second she almost wavered; one passing weakness, masking itself under the guise of modesty, whispered her to turn away from this spot where she was the object of a public stare, from the unhappy girl who once was her friend and who disowned her now. Then she remembered Paul, his parting charge, her plighted word to him—remembered above all that the ruin she looked upon was half Harold's work. How could she face Paul, who was even now on his homeward way, if she gathered her spotless garments from Cressida and passed on now? What power could deafen her against the remorseful outcry of her conscience and her love, if now she should turn from this wrecked life that first by Harold's doing had been set adrift, and leave it to its fate? The mo-

ment's weakness fled as the strong thoughts of Paul and of Harold stormed it and swept it aside in a grand scorn.

"Cressida," she said again, more resolutely, her voice, soft and lowered as it was, ringing clear and true as steel, "it's folly pretending not to know me. I have not sought you all these years to find you and lose you now. Give me your address; where do you live?"

"Nowhere."

"You have some home to go to?"

"None. I'm going to 'move on,' as they're always telling me to."

"Not before you have said a few words more to me."

Athelyn glanced appealingly towards the policeman, and slid her hand quietly into her purse. X. 95's eyes followed the movement.

"You see I know her; she has not been

drinking, and there's nothing wrong with her. Leave her to me—I'll see her safe home," she said, very calmly; and the under-tone of inbred and unquestioned authority in her manner—perhaps taken in combination with her dress and appearance—had its effect.

X. 95 went his way not discontented. His theory was that the poor girl had probably once been servant in the young lady's family, had gone to the bad, and was ashamed to acknowledge herself. Athelyn drew close to Cressida's side, and glanced round the group of lookers-on with cool, tranquil, haughty eyes.

"There is nothing wrong," she said, in tones cold and soft as snow. "There is really no need for anyone to stop."

One or two of the better-bred of the group took the hint, but some lingered to see the upshot of the interview.

“Cressida,” she continued, “you say you have *no home* to-night?”

“No, nor last night either. But if you want to be kind, there’s one thing left on earth for you to do for me—and that is—leave me! I shall do very well!”

“Come, walk a few steps with me then, and let me say a few more words; we cannot talk here,” persisted Athelyn, gently humouring this moody obstinacy.

In accordance with her request, the girl rose up to her feet, but it seemed with an effort that she raised herself, and as she stood she leant against the wall.

“Can you walk?” Athelyn asked, instinctively holding out her hand to help her.

Cressida tried to take a step, but her footfall was uncertain and weak.

“I’m afraid—I can’t,” she said, brokenly. “And if—if I fall—they’ll say——” Her voice grew feebler, and she added, gasping—

ly, as if breath failed her now, "If you'll leave me here, I shall be better soon ; it's only that I—am tired and faint——"

She swayed and faltered ; the street was all swimming before her eyes, and the pavement seemed to sink under her feet. She was only dimly conscious of being faint and dizzy, and clinging blindly to some friendly support.

Athelyn's arm alone would have been a fragile staff, but Jenkinson's assistance was valuable. That faithful handmaiden, at first reluctant and deprecating, but obedient to Athelyn's direction, and then feebly and reluctantly compassionate, lent her support, while Athelyn, who was not one to lose sight of the practical in the sentimental, requested a willing boy, who was gaping at her with admiring and curious eyes, to call a cab.

The cab was soon brought ; Cressida,

sinking and nerveless, had almost to be carried across the pavement and lifted in; Athelyn took her place by her side.

“Where are you taking me?” Cressida asked, rousing up for a moment with a faint gleam of feverish excitement; but she scarcely heard the answer. When Athelyn, who had been speaking to Jenkinson, turned to her, her head had drooped on her shoulder, and she had fainted away.

“Where to, ma’am?” demanded the cabman.

“Where to, Miss Athelyn?” repeated Jenkinson.

Her prophetic soul forecast the answer, but her face lengthened as Athelyn gave the expected reply,

“*Home!*”

CHAPTER XI.

IT IS THE CAUSE.

But to you I have been faithful. Whatsoever good I
lacked,
I loved you! and above my life still hangs that love
intact—
Your love the trembling rainbow—I the reckless
cataract!

ALEXANDER SMITH.

“**B**UT, good heavens, Athelyn!” said
Mrs. Hastings, sitting aghast and
helpless in her easy-chair, “what will you
do with her?”

“To-morrow we’ll think of that—to-
night give her food and rest and care; she
needs them all, I think.”

"In the streets!—on a doorstep!" Mrs. Hastings repeated, going over the most unpleasant points of the story with apparently a certain satisfaction in the indulgence of her dismay. "If anyone had seen you! My dear child, how could you?"

"I did not like it," Athelyn admitted, most frankly, and then added, with a flush on her cheek and a smile that was almost haughty as well as bright, "but, *noblesse oblige*, you know, mother mine, and a Hastings must not be a coward."

"What *are* we to do with her?" This repetition appeared to be all the exertion of which Mrs. Hastings's intellect was capable.

"The worst we can do will be better than the best she can do for herself now," Athelyn said, more gravely.

"Does she look so very bad?" asked Mrs. Hastings, with a mingling of pity, and of shrinking from the recognition of there

being any demand on her pity. She had retired to novel-reading and déshabillé in her dressing-room before Athelyn returned home, and thus had not met the little procession who startled the eyes of the decorous Richards as he opened the door.

“She looks ill,” said Athelyn, “and worse than ill, worn out with trouble. Would you like to come up and see her?” she added, half hesitatingly.

“No, my dear, not to-night I think, unless you particularly wish it,” her mother replied, also hesitatingly; she never committed herself to a trying interview unnecessarily.

“No, I don’t wish it,” Athelyn said, quietly; then they were both silent a little while.

“Mamma,” said Athelyn, suddenly, “you do not, you cannot disapprove? Do you realise what it means to be *alone* in

London streets, by night, without a home, without a friend? Am I made of ice or steel? Could mortal woman have left her there to starve or die—left her, when Paul's last words were that he trusted me? left her, when for all harm that may happen to her I feel still that the responsibility hangs over Harold's head?"

It was seldom of late that she had mentioned Harold's name. Her plea had its effect. Mrs. Hastings's eyes were full of tears; her facile heart was melted; she could not speak, but she kissed her darling fondly; and Athelyn knew that the day was gained, and whatever she chose to do she would have an ally instead of a neutral in her mother.

Then she went upstairs to her own room, where she had left the captive. Cressida was leaning back in a low chair by the fire, weary and dizzy and languid still,

but with a feeble spot of colour on her cheek, a glimmer of light in her hollow eyes.

“You are better?” Athelyn said, gently.

“Much better, thank you. I am all right now.”

She answered in a tone that would to some ears have sounded cold and graceless, there was so little of gratitude or emotion in it, but Athelyn was as keen to perceive the best as slow to suspect the worst. She marked the uneasy restraint in every accent, and interpreted it aright.

With her soft gliding step she came close to Cressida's side, and laid her hand on the back of her chair, and stood half bending over her. Neither spoke. There seemed something unreal about their meeting together now and here. Out there in the cold bright gas-lit streets, their meeting had been a living, stinging reality. But some-

how now that they were side by side in Athelyn's pretty cheerful room by the crackling fire, there was a cold sense of something strange and incredible that held them silent. Athelyn's hand as it rested on the chair almost touched Cressida's shoulder; they were so near together each heard the other's breath in the silence.

Yet all the years that had rolled by since last they parted seemed now more real to them than this hour. Alps on alps of days rose cold and high and impassable between them.

Cressida kept her face averted at first. Yet she felt Athelyn's presence in every nerve; it drew her to look up against her will, until reluctantly and slowly at last she half turned and raised her eyes.

There was no mirror opposite to reflect these two, face to face. But in her mind's eye Cressida saw the picture of the contrast

as it must be, more clearly than if in full colour and form it had fronted her from the great mirror.

She was not absolutely in rags, but the poverty of her dress looked the more sordid and squalid because it was a faded relic of cheap finery, its flimsy trimmings hanging limp and frayed. Athelyn was, as she had always been, finished from the sleek coil of her hair to the tip of the dainty slipper. Soft lace ruffles framed her slim wrists; rings glittered on her long fingers; her sombre silk dress flowed in rich smooth folds and fitted glove-like to her beautiful figure—more beautiful now than in the slim girlish grace of its immaturity.

But this was the smallest part of the contrast. It was not her dainty ladyhood, but the purity and grace of her perfect womanhood, the sense of which smote Cressida like a discord. She looked young and fair

as ever ; no line marred the flawless white of her nobly moulded brow ; the tears that she had shed had left unchanged the frank fearless light of her calm eyes ; and passing Time and passionate regrets had failed to stamp on the pure fresh lips the seal of pain. While Cressida !—of the Cressida of old there seemed to be nothing left but a pale ruin of a face whose youth was dead as a tale that is told—a ghost of lost yesterdays looking out of the hopeless eyes of to-day.

What could these two say to each other ? Every question that rose to their lips was locked there by some restraining thought. Athelyn broke at last a silence that seemed to have lasted long.

“Are there any friends,” she said, softly, “to whom I could write to assure them that you are safe here with me ?”

“There’s no one that cares.” And then the ice once broken she added, and the pain

and the effort in her tone saved it from being hard and morose—"And why—why—have you brought me here? I never thought to see the inside of this house again."

"You said you had no home. Did you think I should consent to leave you without a roof over your head this winter night?"

"I don't know but what the doorstep or the Arches wouldn't be plenty good enough for me. And what shall I be the better for this night's shelter when I go back?"

"Back—where?"

"To the workhouse or the hospital."

"The workhouse? while I live?" Athelyn said, earnestly. "And the hospital? Are you then really ill—worse than tired and weak?"

"I'm ill. I've not been well for weeks—but what's that? I'd as soon be ill as well; it don't matter."

“Not matter?” Athelyn repeated, with a touch of tender womanly anxiety softening her tone, and taking Cressida’s passive hand, she laid her cool fingers gently on the fevered pulse. Cressida shivered slightly and half drew her hand away, and a sort of faint quick sob caught her breath.

“Don’t touch me—you shouldn’t take my hand—” she said, more agitatedly than she had spoken yet. “You wouldn’t—you wouldn’t—if——”

“If what?” asked Athelyn, trying to look into the averted face.

Cressida was dumb a moment; then a new idea of a possible misinterpretation occurred to her, and she said, hastily and bitterly,

“Oh, there’s no fever about it!” yielding her hand more freely. “You don’t think I’d have let you put the tip of your finger

on it if it was likely to hurt you? But you—you wouldn't be—like this to me—if you knew——”

Athelyn paused before she asked slowly, painfully, in a lowered voice,

“Is there then so much that's bad to know?”

“*Yes!*” the other said, with a sort of desperate recklessness. “All—all that's bad, and nothing that's good. What good did you think *I* should have to tell?”

The warm cheery room seemed suddenly to have grown cold to Athelyn. Involuntarily, almost unconsciously, she drew her hand away and lifted both hands to bury her face in them, with a chill sickly feeling as of one seeing the deep waters close over another life.

“You are right to shrink away; you *ought* to. I told you so!” said Cressida,

morbidly alive to the significance of the movement.

Athelyn was still for a moment; she seemed to be looking in despair across an impassable gulf. Then from the far side she saw the ghosts of dead days that seemed to stretch pale shadowy hands in entreaty or in farewell! And that memory bridged it over. Impulsively she knelt down by Cressida's side and caught her two hands in hers, and gazed into her face. But the other's eyes shrank and sank away, and dared not meet the look in Athelyn's.

“Cressida—Cressida!” Athelyn said—and though her voice was scarcely above a whisper, its piercing passion of earnestness reached straight to the other's soul, “if you could look into my heart now, you would see only sorrow there—nothing but sorrow that leaves no room for any other feeling!”

“Are you so sorry for *me*?”

“For you!”

Cressida slowly lifted her eyes and they looked level into Athelyn's once more. In that gaze the wide, wide chasm closed; the two spirits met and revealed themselves each to each again. From depths of despair and shame the one looked out hopelessly. In unutterable pity and pain, and the measureless mercy of the fearless and sinless, the other recognised.

For moments that yet seemed an hour that mutual look endured. Then Cressida writhed away from her with a cry of anguish.

“Oh! don't look at me!” she moaned out. “I can't bear it—I can't bear it! The sight of you—it makes me feel as I should never have felt again if I hadn't seen you now. I was dead—you wake me up to life. In mercy let me feel all numb and dead again!”

Athelyn's lips quivered, and a tearless sob took her breath as she trembled in the passion of her pity.

“Oh, Cressida, it was through *me!*” she murmured, brokenly, remorsefully. “If it had not been for me, this never would have been! I thought to do you good, but Fate turned the weapon against you whom I tried to save, and I did only harm! What? *I* shrink from *you*—when I was unwittingly the cause! It is yourself you have wronged—yourself alone. And do you think that I have known real peace and comfort all these years, when the thought of you, and of what your lot might be, has followed me day and night?”

Her agitated earnestness seemed somehow rather to calm than to further excite Cressida. An access of weakness had followed her first outburst of emotion, and her head was leaning faintly back on the cushion.

She looked on the other's fair and pure and pitying face more as if in a sorrowful dream than a stinging reality.

"Did you think of me then?" she said, feebly. "I never thought to see you again. It doesn't seem real to see you. And I never thought to see this room any more. It isn't a bit changed—your room. I've seen the outside of the house—many times. I've passed it and looked up at the windows—oh, so often!"

"And I never knew it!"

"No, I never let you see me. As I'd have run away from the plague, I'd have run away from you—from you of all the world!" she said, breaking down with a wailing sigh.

Then she drew herself apart from Athelyn, and began to sob passionately and wring her hands and moan out incoherent words.

Athelyn rose to get her a glass of water, and tried to soothe her into calm.

“Oh! Athelyn,” she said, weeping bitterly still, but more coherently, “it has all been dark—dark! And down in the blackness I got to forget that there was light, but now—but now—oh, do you think that down in the pit one likes to catch a glimpse of heaven?”

“If you catch a glimpse of light, it is the dawn of a new day. Look up, look up!” pleaded Athelyn—“look never back down into the darkness again; it is never—never too late for day to dawn.”

“Oh, too late—too late for me!” Cressida murmured, with hidden face. Then after a pause, she said, “You’ve asked me no questions, Athelyn.”

“And I will ask you none. I will never pry into the time that lies between the day we parted and this night. Only as in those

days I wanted to help you any way I could, and that I did so little has been my regret ever since ; so now I am here with one chief object—to help you—to-night and always—with all my heart, with all my strength.”

“I am not worthy—not worthy !” sobbed Cressida. “Oh, if I had never lost you—never parted from you ! And now that I’m with you again, my angel—you were always an angel to me—now it comes too late ; it’s only torture ! Your eyes look through and through me—it’s as if Heaven’s justice—and its mercy too—looked at me through your eyes. You are crying, Athelyn?—don’t, don’t ! You are too far off—a world away—to cry for me.”

She caught Athelyn’s hand and kissed it passionately, and as if that touch unloosed a storm of memories, she broke into wilder sobs and sank down on her knees, moaning

out, "No, no—don't lift me up; at your feet, Athelyn—at your feet is the place for me!"

CHAPTER XII.

“THE DAY WILL DAWN!”

May the day of your woe and your dread
Be meted with the measure of the guile ye dealt to me
When ye sealed your heart from pity and forgot my
misery!

MORRIS.

“SHE will be better in the morning; a night’s rest will do her good,” thought Athelyn, as she stole light-footed to Cressida’s bedside and watched the fevered and broken sleep into which she had fallen at last.

But in the morning the most sanguine eye could not have cheated itself into the

belief that she was better. She was evidently worse and weaker. Mrs. Hastings need not have dreaded the interview, for when she saw the girl she half shrank from seeing, she had no words to utter save of compassion and dismay.

“She is very ill,” she said, anxiously, to Athelyn.

“I am afraid so,” Athelyn agreed. “The first thing to be done is to send for Dr. Davis.”

Dr. Davis was sent for accordingly, and presently he came, and after an interview with his patient, was waylaid on leaving the room by Athelyn, who was waiting anxiously to hear his report. The doctor had attended the Hastings family for many years; Athelyn was a favourite patient of his, although she did not trouble him much, and he was in the habit of speaking more plainly to her than he did to her mother,

and relying on her to carry out all his instructions.

“That poor girl should have been under medical care weeks ago. Her lungs must have been affected for a long time,” he said.

“Is she *very* ill?” Athelyn asked, anxiously.

“It is likely to be a serious case,” he answered, cautiously. “You must put her to bed and keep her there. Has she any friends?”

“I think not—not in London, at least. If she has, would it be well to let them know?”

“It would be as well. She has been sadly neglected; and now it is a critical case—a very critical case,” he added, gravely, the pith of his opinion being always in his last words.

Cressida had refused at first to be treated

as an invalid; in a feeble rally of strength she had insisted on getting up, and by slow efforts achieved a partial toilette. She had on a morning dress of Athelyn's. Of old the same garments had fitted both. Athelyn was slender of figure, but her dress hung loosely now on the other's wasted form. Cressida, the younger of the two, looked years the older. Even the glory of her golden hair did not remain to her unchanged. It had been cut short; its shining colour seemed somehow to have faded; there was little left to tell of the old bright rippling river of gold that had streamed sunlit over her shoulders when she shook it down in the summer mornings.

"I shall be such a trouble to you, I am afraid," she said, piteously and deprecatingly, as Athelyn came near.

"Trouble, dear? that's not a word to be named between us. I am only thankful, so

thankful, that we met last night—that you are safe and cared for here with us to-day.”

Her voice was more earnest than she meant it to be; it betrayed her thought; and when Cressida looked up in her face her eyes betrayed her too. Cressida looked at her steadily and silently.

“I didn’t think I was so bad!” she said at last, with a strange faint smile—the first Athelyn had seen on her face. Such a smile—it did not bring back a reminiscence of the old Cressida, whose fresh rosy lips had smiled with such frank child-like mirth; it seemed a feeble reflection caught from some far-off light not of this world.

As the day wore on, all the more alarming symptoms of her illness increased. She suffered with the pathetic patience of a child. She could not talk much, for the racking cough that came on in paroxysms seemed to tear her frail frame to pieces; but

when she could speak she would mutter distressedly her grief at being a trouble and a burden, until she saw that such regrets gave Athelyn real pain. It was new and sweet to her to be tenderly cared for once more, to breathe an atmosphere of peace and comfort, to hear soft steps treading lighter as they drew near her, subdued voices lowering as they spoke to her—so sweet that even when she suffered most, she never uttered a syllable of complaint, and that faint pale smile came ever and anon to her lips as she greeted Athelyn's approach.

In the evening, when Dr. Davis saw his patient again, he looked grave, and the few words of conventional hope and faint encouragement that he spoke did not deceive Athelyn, nor the invalid herself.

When he had gone, Athelyn, returning to Cressida's side and bending down over her to see if she had fallen asleep, perceived

that heavy tears were stealing from under the closed lids.

“Are you in pain, dear?” she asked.

“No—no,” the pale lips murmured. “Not in pain—I am *happy*!” Then her eyes opened; and, dim, hollow, and tear-stained though they were, there shone in them a struggling gleam of something like far-off hope and joy, and the light of that strange unearthly smile played over her wan face again.

“You said—that day would dawn yet for me,” she added, with a clearer ring in her voice. “And now—I feel it will! I do catch a glimpse of the dawn. But the night must come first——”

The smile rested on her lips awhile; then faded slowly as the last light of sunset.

“A long, long night,” she murmured—
“rest—sleep—and then—and then——”

She looked up at Athelyn with a sort of wild wistfulness.

“And then!” Athelyn echoed, solemnly, tenderly. “Dear, was there ever a darkness that did not melt away in sunrise?”

All this time they had never mentioned the names of Paul Severne nor of Harold Parkhurst. But the consciousness of these two was ever present with them; it seemed that in their absence their influence invisibly breathed in the daily life, filled the very air around the two women whose lives had been linked with theirs. Athelyn and Cressida could never be together on earth without these unseen presences filling Banquo’s chair between them. When they met, those ghosts—ghosts of the living, not the dead—arose uncalled and kept them chill and silent company. By some secret subtle sympathy each even knew when the spell of that presence was strongest on the

other. They each felt where the other soul was wandering, read in each other's eyes the names they left unuttered; yet when such looks met they averted them and shrank away.

But late that night, Cressida, who was lying white and weak, but comparatively free from pain, broke silence suddenly.

“Do you ever—ever hear from—Australia?”

“Yes. The latest news is——”

“Well?”

“He is coming back.”

Cressida looked up half startled.

“When?”

“Soon—very soon,” Athelyn answered, cautiously, “if he sailed in the vessel he intended, he is now on his way—must be close home indeed.”

She waited, expecting that Cressida's next words would be some further inquiry

concerning Paul. But they were uttered with a new agitation after a pause that seemed long—and they were not of Paul.

“I’ve not long to live. You know that—and I know it—and I’m glad to know it. Else I’d not ask—but my time may be short—I must ask you now——” she panted, and a faint hectic spot glowed on her cheek. “Now tell me—tell me about *him*!” She raised herself on her pillow as she spoke; and her weak voice deepened with startling, unconscious energy; it was as if at the mention of *him* the one strong passion of the soul scorned the feebleness of the flesh.

“There is little to tell, dear. He is abroad, I think. In Italy, I believe.”

“You—have seen him? when did you see him?”

“I did not see him at all until, a year ago, I met him, by chance, at a country

house. And this spring I saw him, by chance, twice in London. That is all.”

“All!” echoed Cressida, gazing in the other’s face with fixed sad eyes, rather mournful than questioning, that seemed to see back into all the past through the present hour.

“Athelyn,” she said at last, with strange earnestness, “do you love him still?”

She could not have evaded, even had it been in her nature to evade, the question of those eyes. She owned, without a tremor in her voice,

“I am afraid I do!”

Cressida made no answer for awhile; then she sighed to herself slowly,

“So long ago—— All past—all past and gone. But some day, Athelyn, *you’ll* see him again?”

“I *may*. I don’t know. If I meet him it will be by chance. If I should see him

—is there—is there any word that you would wish me to say to him ?”

“No, I’ve no message—none. He would not care. And it’s all an old story, dead and gone. I cried my tears out long ago. I don’t know now whether I forgive him or not—I don’t know—whether I love him or not; I’m only weary—tired of living.”

She turned her head sighingly; then the fitful flush came on her cheek again, and she tossed about with a sort of restless impatience that seemed to counteract the lethargy of her words. Presently she added abruptly, excitedly,

“Why can’t I forget?—can’t I ever forget? I’ve no message—but I want to tell you, Athelyn—once—not long ago, but it seems long—I thought of him and of how all my life went wrong through him. All—all, from the beginning—I thought of the day I saw him first—and I felt so happy—and

didn't know why it was—didn't know I'd better have died that day—I thought of everything, and I hated him. I couldn't hate a murderer who had killed my body as I hated him who killed my soul. I thought how it's written, 'The wages of sin is Death.' And I prayed—it's the last, last time I prayed—that he might be paid his wages for this ruined life of mine. I knelt and prayed that for all I'd suffered he might suffer more. I prayed that if there was thunder in Heaven it might fall on him!” Her words were pressing on each other with feverish excitement. “I cursed him—and my soul seemed full of nothing but hate of him!” She paused suddenly, and her tone changed. “Athelyn—you hate me now?”

Athelyn was paler than she; her lips were tight set; her breast heaving in deep sighs. But after a minute's silence she laid her hand lightly, firmly on Cressida's.

"I don't hate you," she said, under her breath. "Go on."

"Well," continued Cressida, still feverishly, "something came home to me and told me that that prayer of mine was *heard*, and I could never unsay it. It is following him. He's happy now, maybe—and some other woman now is spoiling her life for him. But there's misfortune on his track; it will find him out—and hunt him down some day; and, Athelyn, know the worst of me—you must know the worst! When I think of him—and of pain or death or sorrow touching him—I feel something like a wicked joy even now—and yet—and yet——"

She gasped for breath, and tossed restlessly on her pillows, and struggled pantingly to speak on.

"Hush, hush!" said Athelyn, anxiously. "Do not agitate yourself. I ought not to

have let you talk; it is bad for you.”

She strove to calm her with soothing words, and to some extent succeeded, but a little later she could not resist going back once more to the subject that was weighing heavy upon her soul. There were words that struggled at her lips for utterance; she could not let the hour pass and leave them unspoken—the hour that might be the last.

“What are you thinking?” Cressida said, faintly, fixing her earnest eyes, with their seeking look of unrest, on Athelyn’s face.

Athelyn paused before she answered, very softly, yet not persuasively, only with deep sadness,

“Cressida, I would not hear you say it if it were not true, but I wish—oh! how I wish—that I could hear you say that you forgive him!”

“Forgive him?” Cressida echoed, as if strangely questioning with herself.

Her face changed and quivered, the tears gushed from her eyes, and swift upon the late resentment the reaction came. The wild undisciplined heart, that had ever swayed and trembled to every impulse, tossed on conflicting waves, beat weak and passionate to the last. She broke into wild and choking sobs that Athelyn endeavoured in vain to soothe.

“Oh, I do—I do!” she cried—“I do forgive him all—all! you know I do!—More freely—more utterly than I dare hope to be forgiven—I forgive him now!”

CHAPTER XIII.

HOMeward BOUND.

There shall never be one lost good ! What was, shall
live as before—

The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound ;
What was good, shall be good, with, for evil, so much
good more,

On the earth the broken arcs ; in the heaven, a perfect
round !

ROBERT BROWNING.

THE next morning Athelyn read in the
day's paper the announcement of the
arrival of the vessel in which Paul had
written them word that he should sail for
England. She went up to Cressida doubt-
fully, undecided whether or not to mention

this news to her, in regard to the agitation it might cause, as from the excitement of the previous night she had fallen into a state of alarming exhaustion, and had been with difficulty restored and soothed at last into a troubled sleep. But there was no need for her to debate the question. She might talk the news over freely by the invalid's bedside or keep the subject banished, just as she chose. From that disturbed sleep Cressida had awoke with wandering mind, and the words they spoke to her fell unheeded on her ear as she lay moaning and murmuring to herself.

All that day Athelyn and her mother wondered when Paul would come. That he would come to them soon on his arrival in England, that indeed they would be the very first people whom he would seek, they were assured. They did not know what address would find him, or they would have

written or telegraphed to tell him *who* lay stricken down by mortal illness under their roof. All day Cressida lay restless and wandering, with interludes of utter exhaustion, in each of which they thought the lowly flickering lamp of life would die out.

A merciful forgetfulness veiled from her, not only the present, but all the melancholy story of her past. The dark days and years seemed blotted out of her memory now. She talked of her little sister, dead nearly a score of years ago—fancied herself a child at school again. Once only the clouds seemed to part from her brain a little, and a faint glimpse of the tragedy of her life to cross her mind—once only she mentioned the name which Athelyn had never heard her waking lips utter. Starting from a brief sleep, in which she had tossed and moaned as if in a painful dream, she stretched out her hands to recall some

vanishing shadow that none saw but herself, and said,

“Don’t go away, *Harold*—come back !”

Then she added pitifully, with a sob like a chidden child,

“Harold, are you angry? oh, don’t be cross! I never meant to vex you!”

Athelyn shivered and drew back into the shadow of the curtains.

We never empty the cup of bitterness distilled from any one association; it is exhaustless as the magician’s ever-flowing draught. Drink deep of it as we may, we never drain it; the bitter drops are ever fresh when the cup is put to our lips. There was a sharp sting left for Athelyn when she heard that utterance of his name.

That evening they knew that it was unlikely that Cressida would ever see the day. “Nothing can be done,” Dr. Davis said. “I’ll come again—but it is only a question

of hours!" Two hours later the sound of stopping wheels grated at the door, and the hall-bell rang with a vigorous peal.

"The doctor again?" suggested Mrs. Hastings, doubtfully, with a half startled look.

"Not the doctor!" said Athelyn, pale and undoubtful. "*Paul!*"

Her instinct was right. Paul Severne, altered, bronzed, and weather-beaten, with a thread or two of grey in his beard, but stronger and more stalwart than of old, walked in quietly, with a placid, "Well, here I am, you see!" as if he had but left them for a week.

Mother and daughter hastened forward to welcome him with warm and affectionate greetings, which, as he instantly perceived, were somewhat embarrassed as well as sincerely glad. In Athelyn's exclamation of thankfulness at his arrival he detected an

accent of what seemed unnecessary earnestness for even devoted friendship.

“What’s up?” he said, looking acutely from one to the other. “You’re both well? you’re not in any trouble?”

Then after all the long years of change and absence that had rolled between the past and him, he leapt without a doubt at once to the conclusion.

“You have news for me of Cressida?”

They exchanged glances.

“Bad news, of course,” he said, quietly, “what is it?”

“I do not know that it is *bad* news, Paul,” Athelyn said, softly and sadly. “She is here.”

He looked in her face and understood in silence. Then he said only,

“Am I in time?”

Presently, leaving Paul with her mother,

promising to return or send for him directly she had done her errand, Athelyn went up to Cressida's room, to ascertain if it would be well for her to see Paul, to try to make her understand by gentle degrees that Paul had come. But all in vain she endeavoured to recall the wandering spirit to a sense of the present, or even to a recognition of her. On her, the one woman in the world whom she had loved, Cressida looked as a stranger now. She fancied she was going on a journey by sea, and was afraid of being too late to catch the boat.

"What's o'clock? the boat won't wait," she kept muttering, restlessly. "How far is it to the pier? do help me to make haste."

Jenkinson, who was sitting by the bedside, looked at Athelyn significantly, and shook her head.

"Tell Mr. Severne to come up at once,"

Athelyn said. "I'll stay with her till you bring him."

He came, and stood by Cressida's side ; and she looked at him with blank, unrecognising eyes.

"Do you know him, dear?" asked Athelyn.

"Yes, it's the captain."

"Speak to her, Paul."

"Cressida?" he whispered—and said no more than her name.

She looked at him with a little more interest, but still with no emotion of recognition.

"Are *you* the captain?" she said, half wonderingly. "I've seen you somewhere before—But if you're the captain—you'll tell the boat to wait for me?"

"Yes," he said, "the boat shall wait."

She seemed relieved by this assurance, and the lids drooped over her tired eyes.

“Don’t you hear the waves?” she murmured, feebly. “Oh, I hear the waves so plain!”

In silence as they bent over her, and their eyes met, they two heard in memory the waves that had whispered on the shore one sunny day—the one supremest day of their strange sweet friendship—the last day that they three were happy together, with no secret consciousness breathing cold air between them. Now they three met in this last hour when the one wrecked life was drifting to its close. And their souls heard the presaging murmur of the waves of the greater sea on which one of them must float away this hour.

For they knew the moment was near—the hour had come.

She made a sudden faint effort to raise herself.

Paul lifted her up; she rested content on

his arm, unconscious that it was his ; and as she looked away beyond them all, a sort of glad wonder came into her eyes.

“The boat is there!” she murmured. “Oh, what a lovely night ! How white the sails are ! How bright they shine !”

A faint, strange smile lit up her face ; and with that wondering joy in her eyes she gazed a moment, and tried to stretch out her hand, as if pointing to something unseen, and her pale lips just framed the words that they, bending over her, could barely distinguish.

“White—beautiful——”

Then her head sank back upon Paul’s shoulder, and in his arms her spirit fluttered from its prison and passed into the unknown in one last sigh that yet seemed not of pain.

So Death was gentler to her than Life had been ; and over her no tears of longing to recall the parted soul were shed, by even

those who had loved her best, and who loved her still. They could not wish her back with them ; they knew that earth, with all its vast possibilities, could have held for her now no lot as happy as to pass away at peace, seeing fair sights their eyes saw not, unknowing of the life she had lived, the death she died.

* * * * *

“That volume of my life is shut and locked,” Paul said to Athelyn, on the day that they had looked their last upon her face before the coffin-lid closed over it. “Long shut,” he added, abstractedly, after a pause, “but never really locked till now. Time is a wonderful healer of all bitterness. Sometimes when I have been far away from the habitations of men, and the world was non-existent to me, and I was alone with our great Mother Earth, I used to think”—he paused again before he continued—“to

think that there's nothing in life irretrievable, and room on earth for all. Well! those thoughts are over now. And whether the end comes soon or late, does it matter much? Perhaps it's well she never knew me. It would have given her pain, maybe. And as it is, I think we should never have seen such perfect peace on her face in life as that we saw just now."

"Paul," said Athelyn, looking at him sadly, "I never knew a man like you!"

She sighed; there was no comfort, only bitterness in the thought.

Over them both the shadows were lowering darkly then. Possibly in them both stirred a sorrowful sense, too vague to be a consciousness, too subtle and faint to be a thought—of lost possibilities—

"The hours which might have been, yet might not be," of their lives. They two had never been aught but friends. They neither of them

had ever touched the spring that sealed the great fount of love in the other's heart. They had each poured the treasure of their love to waste. Yet what affluence of riches had been there! Lost and lavished now beyond recall—the wealth of living waters would gush no more. Perhaps it was from the perplexed depths of such thoughts as these that Athelyn's words broke, as she said drearily,

“Are the skeins of *all* lives tangled upon earth?”

“It seems so,” Paul agreed. “Threads that might have run so smooth—never to be unravelled now! Fair threads—spoilt in the weaving!”

It was twilight; he could not see the tears in Athelyn's eyes, but he heard her stifled sigh.

“We must not look for happiness on earth, Athelyn,” he said, suddenly, with the

old steady ring of faith returning to his voice; "have you and I not learned that lesson yet? To look for happiness is like looking for justice here—here, where the innocent get the guilty's portion, where Right is trampled under foot by Might. All things are incomplete. What can ripen to completion in this life that is itself but a fragment? For happiness as for justice, for reward as for retribution, we must wait. She"—he paused, his voice changed and softened—" *she* has reached the great solution of all the tangles that perplex us here."

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE STUDIO.

Fate steals along with silent tread,
Found oftenest in what least we dread ;
Frowns in the storm with angry brow,
But in the sunshine strikes the blow !

COWPER.

IT was a mild evening between late winter and early spring. Harold Parkhurst, who had returned from Italy and was re-installed in his London studio, was walking along thinking of the picture which he was then painting, undiscouraged by the rejection of his "St. Catherine" for the Academy. The world had been going well with him lately ;

he was in a sanguine mood, looking as happy and handsome as it was in the nature of his face to look as he sauntered along with his easy, swinging step. He was not thinking of love lost or won, not troubling himself with memories of the living or the dead, not noting a silent shadow that stole after him and tracked his steps through the twilight.

The grass was growing over Cressida's lowly grave ; in Athelyn's heart his name still was shrined alone, the key-note of all the joy and all the sorrow of her life. In other dreams and thoughts his face was the shadow or the light that marred or glorified the picture. Vigils were kept for him, prayers went up to heaven for him ; living hate and living love were breathing blessings or curses on his head. But he was only thinking of his picture—"Edith of the Swan-neck seeking over the Battle-field,"—seeing in

his mind's eye the fiery rays of red and lurid light breaking through the pall of inky clouds that lowered over the field of Sanguelac. He intended that stormy sunset sky to be one of his achievements. The dusk was closing over the scene; the horizon of the battle-field was dim and murky, fading into gloom; all that there was of light was caught and concentrated on the one prominent figure of Edith searching among the dark and shadowy forms of the slain. Yes, he was very well satisfied with his figure; the expression of his Edith did not yet content him, but there was time to heighten and complete it.

He entered his studio, eager to get to work, although the daylight was past. There was a brisk bright fire crackling welcome; the place looked cheery and homely as well as picturesque, with its fur rugs and rich curtains and ruddy firelight shadows.

playing about. It was probably dusty and certainly untidy; there were coats hung on easels, slippers scattered in corners, books piled on chairs, and a wide-awake slouched over the classic brows of Clytie; but Harold liked it so, and had never during his reign allowed it to undergo the process of a thorough "putting to rights." He cast a satisfied glance round—perhaps he hugged himself mentally on his happy bachelor freedom; he took off his overcoat and threw it on the nearest chair, lit the gas, and turned to his easel.

The half-finished picture was slashed across and across, hacked almost into ribbons by deep gashes that ran from corner to corner and cut the canvas through.

The studio-bell rang with unusual violence; the respectable elderly female who attended, hastened to answer the summons.

"Look here," Mr. Parkhurst said, quietly,

but with thunder-clouds on his brow—clouds which the woman had seen before, though never so dark as now, and of which she had a wholesome dread. She burst into exclamations of astonishment and dismay, and even at first was inclined to be incredulous as to the existence of the damage, as she declared it to be utterly impossible it could have been inflicted by anyone.

“Who has been in here?”

“No one, sir—no one at all but me to see to the fire.”

“Some practical joke,” Mr. Parkhurst said, grimly; “some one must have got in secretly.”

“They couldn’t, sir; the door’s been shut, and the bell’s never rang. Mr. MacVarnish, he have his latch-key, and you have yours, and there’s nobody else as *could* get in.”

Parkhurst reflected. MacVarnish was an old friend and chum of his; but was it

within the limits of possibility that any visitor of MacVarnish's—whose studio was flung open day and night to a horde of happy Bohemians—could have perpetrated so audacious a “joke” in some half-drunken freak incited by MacVarnish's good Scotch whisky? He went straight up to MacVarnish.

“Just come down a minute, will you?” he said, in a tone that little accorded with the apparent hospitality of the words.

MacVarnish, who was an emulous pupil in the Parkhurst school and had a habit of responding docilely to his leader's word, complied.

The mutilated canvas being pointed out to him, he gave a long whistle of unfeigned dismay, followed by an emphatic, “The devil !”

“Now,” said Parkhurst, “who has been in this house to-day?”

“Not a soul’s been to my place but Will Tregarne and old Vandyke. We must have Mrs. Williams up, and ask her if anyone’s been for you.”

“I’ve asked her. She says *no one*; says that no one could get in, for the door has been shut all day.”

MacVarnish stood contemplating the gashed picture, and in his perplexity apostrophised the devil again.

“There are not any *children* in the house, are there?” he said, presently, as if struck by a brilliant idea.

“We’ll soon ascertain,” said Parkhurst, ringing the bell.

Mrs. Williams appeared with wonderful alacrity. There had not been man, woman, or child in the house that day, it appeared, except the visitors MacVarnish had named and an elderly friend of Mrs. Williams’—“a widder of sixty odd, as

had never been even near the studio !”

“At that age it would be scarcely likely she should amuse herself with such pranks,” observed Mr. Parkhurst, vouchsafing a slight smile. “There’s the garden-door !” he added, abruptly, after a minute’s reflection. “Is that kept locked ?”

“Locked ? Well, sir, I don’t know as it’s always locked—you see, sir, it’s a long way round to the kitching-door, and the butcher he sometimes come in that way ; but, lord, sir, who’d ever come all the way round by the garden-door ?”

“It’s evident that somebody has got in somehow. MacVarnish,” struck by a new thought, “didn’t I hear you say something about losing a latch-key ?”

“Yes, I did lose my duplicate latch-key—but, my dear fellow, that was weeks, months ago.”

“I’ll have this cleared up somehow,” said

Parkhurst, gazing moodily at his spoilt canvas.

“It’s uncomfortable,” said MacVarnish, sincerely and gravely. “Looks as if you’d got a hidden enemy somewhere. Gives one rather a creepy feeling somehow.”

Parkhurst looked at him with one of his quick, half-questioning under-glances, partly surprised that MacVarnish should have hit so exactly on his own feeling in the matter. Although he did not acknowledge it, and was scarcely pleased at hearing it put into words, a certain chilly sense of vague uneasiness had touched him—had it been a little stronger it would have been like the presentiment of one who feels a danger is lurking near him in the dark and knows not where.

But he did not plead guilty to sharing MacVarnish’s sentiments ; and only observed, inspecting narrowly the depth of the damage,

“It’s been done with my own palette-knife, I believe. Yes, there’s no doubt of it; here are the marks. With this knife.”

“That looks like—like impulse? an unpremeditated thing, doesn’t it?” observed MacVarnish, wisely. “There’s something about this, do you know, Parkhurst, that strikes me as not like a *man’s* malice.”

Parkhurst pondered this idea, while absently wiping the palette-knife, and came to the conclusion that there was a good deal of truth in MacVarnish’s suggestion. This was truly *not* like a man’s work. Then although he of course had had rivals over and over again in the fields of both art and love, still on the whole he had not many enemies, and no enemy whom he could think of as capable of this piece of childish spite, among men.

“I think you’re right, MacVarnish,” he said, slowly, with his brows knitted into the

perpendicular line that often cut them deep as a knife-scar; but he entered no further into the subject. Running his finger along the severed canvas, he resumed quietly, "It's too bad to be lined. Can't be patched up. I must paint the whole thing over again."

"You will? By Jove, you've energy!"

"Of course I will," he responded, with his cool scornful smile. "Did you think I was going to let myself be beaten by *this*?"

CHAPTER XV.

A BLOW BEHIND THE SHIELD.

All's done with ; wait who may,
 Watch and wear and wonder who will !
 Oh, my whole life that ends to-day !
 Oh, my soul's sentence ! sounding still !
ROBERT BROWNING.

THE next day Harold Parkhurst set to work with vigour on a new canvas. Resentment at the damage done to his picture, irritation at the mystery surrounding the infliction of that damage, above all, defiance of the idea that *he* could be balked and cast back by such an incident, put new strength into his hand and brain. With almost vehement energy he worked on all

day, and grew more and more sanguine and confident as he worked. An alteration here, an improvement there, occurred to him; this the second portrayal of the Swan-neck searching the field of Sanguelac should be finer than the first.

“It will do—it will do; we’ll see if they reject *this*,” he said to himself, with a satisfied smile, seeing less the actual half-covered canvas than the potential scene that to only his eye now lay latent in those bare bald lines—the gloom of the silent battle-field—the ruddy haze of the stormy sunset—the central figure of Edith with the one fixed passion on her marble face.

If Self was Harold Parkhurst’s idol, yet that Self was so inseparably wedded to Art that he worshipped both in one shrine. Other men might make their deities of Love and Home. Art was Parkhurst’s goddess, and Fame the temple whose high altar he

strained every nerve of life to reach, and for whose incense he would have offered up what heart he had, and deemed it not much sacrifice.

Tired of work at last—or rather, forced by the aching stiffness of his hand to pause and give himself time to realise that he was tired—that his eyes were dazed and weary, he threw himself down on the low couch near the easel to rest, pulled a buffalo rug over him, made himself luxuriously comfortable, and not unnaturally fell asleep. He was not of those robustly happy and healthy people whose sleep is sound and dreamless. He generally dreamt, and drifted away into dreamland now. He met with no marvellous adventures there, met only his waking thoughts wandering about aimlessly and in odd disguises. And yet, that dream, would he ever forget it?

Of course it was of his recommenced

picture, the pivot on which all his thoughts turned that day, that he dreamt. He saw it in all its completion, more perfect and wonderful to his dreaming eye than ever his waking hand could paint it, hanging in the place of honour on the walls of a great gallery. And as in our dreams we calmly accept the most impossible monstrosities as common-places of every day, receive it as a matter of course that the cat on the hearth-rug should wax to the size of a donkey and address us in a human voice, and take our own metamorphosis into a white elephant as the most natural thing in the world, so it did not seem strange to him that, while he stood as one of an admiring group crowding round his own picture, he yet was himself the fallen chief lying there in the shadows of the fatal field with the arrow through his brain.

He knew that Edith was near him, seek-

ing for him ; the hem of her robe almost touched his stained and matted hair, yet he could stir neither limb nor finger ; no sound would pass his stiffened lips. He was dead, and could give no sign in answer to the unuttered despair he felt so near him, unseen in the silence. Yet still it was he himself, another self, who stood looking on at his own work and thinking it was well. In this divided self he was perplexed. Was he the triumphant artist ? Was he the slaughtered king ?

“ I shall wake and all will be well ; this death is but a dream ! ” he thought, with half his brain.

“ If *this* should be but a dream, and it is I myself in truth who am lying slain in my own life-blood there ? ” was the answering thought.

Then a vague struggling wonder began to wake in his mind.

“Is that Edith? *Who is Edith?*—Her face is turned away; I did not paint it so! How came it so then? Why has she turned her face away?”

There came upon him suddenly the unreasoning horror of a dream. He dreaded the sight of her face; he wished he had not called upon her to turn; a cold chill of appalling but formless foreboding froze him as the shadowy motionless figure moved; and with the struggle to speak, to stop her showing her hidden face, he woke—woke with a start, to see, indeed, a woman standing by his side.

How long she had stood there watching his sleep he never knew. Her watch was that of the crouching tiger, her action swift as the tiger's leap at last. Even as he started and woke, as he looked up and saw her and read in her face *something*—he knew not what—but something that made him feel

as if the horror of the dream was still upon him—even then, before a word could be spoken, there was one rapid, stealthy movement of her hand under her mantle, and the next moment she had dashed the contents of the phial she clutched full in his face.

Fire seemed to scorch his eyes and devour every nerve in one fierce blaze. Yet it was not *pain* that tore its way to utterance in one wild, half stifled cry—the first and the last that agony of body or of soul ever wrung from Harold Parkhurst's lips.

Old Mrs. Williams, startled by the sound, and by a strange laugh that followed it—a woman's laugh that, although it only came faintly and muffled to her ears, yet somehow froze the blood in her veins—came hurrying to the studio. At the door she brushed by a veiled woman, who fled past her without

a word of answer to her hasty inquiry, and wrenched herself strong as a lioness from her detaining hand. In the studio she found the artist stretched at the foot of his easel, stiff and senseless as stone, his hands convulsively clenched across his brow; and turning his face to the light, the old woman shrieked aloud.

“Who has done this?”

This was the question they all asked; the first question that he heard when he recovered consciousness; the question reiterated by doctor and friend. But none could obtain from him an answer that would give them any clue.

“Who was the woman?”

“I don’t know.”

“Did you not recognise her face?”

“No.”

“Nor hear her voice?”

“No.” Perhaps there was not one of them present who was deceived by his denial.

“Don’t ask him any more!” MacVarnish said, drawing the doctor aside. “He’ll never tell!”

And there was an unconscious accent of admiration in his tone.

When all but the doctor had left Harold’s couch, when the racking pains that had seemed to eat his very brain away were somewhat mitigated, and the cooling bandages bound on his brow, then it was his turn to question. He had but one question to put, the question they had all been dreading and preparing to avert, the question that even the doctor—habituated to every form and phase of human suffering—felt a certain discomfort in knowing he must answer.

“Doctor, you know me?” Harold said, abruptly.

“Know you? yes, my dear fellow.”

“I mean, you’ve known me a long time ; you know I’m not a coward. Now tell me, the plain truth, in a word—shall I ever see again?”

“My dear friend——”

Harold foreknew the answer.

“Never?” he questioned, steadily.

“Never in this world ! The sight is hopelessly destroyed.”

In dead silence Harold heard his doom ; not a muscle trembled ; not a syllable passed his lips. Yet from less agony many a soul overstrained has snapt its chain to mortality. In silence he felt a living darkness closing, closing upon him like a coffin-lid, while a sound as of great waters thundered and surged in his ear.

“Never—never—never !”

After that hour he could say the bitterness of death was past.

There could be no bitterness left in Death like that in the cup now pressed to his lips by Life--the cup that only Death could dash aside.

CHAPTER XVI.

'TWIXT LOVE AND LOVE.

Truth's no cleaner thing than Love !
 I comprehend a love so fiery hot
 It burns its natural veil of august shame,
 And stands sublimely in the nude, as chaste
 As Medicean Venus !

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

HAROLD stood alone in his studio again. He had insisted on being alone ; he cursed the kindness that tried to force its presence on him as a comfort ; he felt as if he almost hated every human creature who walked in the light of day and stretched a helping hand to him out in the darkness. Darkness ! Why, they did not

know what darkness was, and they dared to think their shallow sympathy could lighten it !

In every man the angel and the devil wrestle in his hour of anguish. He, during whose blackest hours the conquering angel treads the demon down, never fathoms the deepest depths of suffering. But in Harold's heart the weaker angel cowered and fled.

He groped around the well-known place. It seemed years since he had left it, instead of only a few days—days of fever and prostration from which he had but now rallied. Each object on which his hand fell was so familiar and yet so strange. The unframed canvases that leant against the wall—the dusty portfolios and half-finished sketches in corners—he knew them everyone so well. Was it possible that it was only by touch that he should know them for evermore ?

The bandage was on his eyes ; the burning pain still ever and anon throbbed through his brow. And yet it seemed incredible that, with the vast world of light and of beauty glowing round him, no ray save phantasmagoria reflections from memory or fancy should ever reach his darkened eyes. He could realise the present ; but that this black shadow stretched to the day of his death, blotted out all his future, this was hard to realise in all its force.

Form and colour were to be mere names and recollections to him. With full life pulsing in every vein, his hand strong and skilful to execute, his brain fertile to conceive, he stood amongst his half-completed works, helpless for evermore.

Yet there came home to him a certain vague sense of a retributive fate in this. All his life long he had played with Love, insulted its might, and trodden it down into

his slave. And slighted Love, outraged and tortured, had turned and slain him at last. Slain him ? nay, worse than slain him ; what was death to this ?

The man who makes his soul's idol of a mortal woman, and sees Death chill the lips he loved and seal the eyes that were the twin stars of his life, may still dream that in another world she waits for him—that from her heaven her starry eyes look down and keep their tender vigil unseen, and her immortal love will greet him on the threshold there. But Harold had no thought of any other world—no faith, no hope, no illusion, to comfort him in *this*. Art had been as a bride to him—Fame his only idol.

The cold abstraction he had worshipped was gone from him—gone as a body without a soul. On the lips of his murdered hope he could press no farewell kiss, cling

to no memory of last fond parting words, cherish no dream of re-union. More dead than the mortal shell from which the soul has flown, which still retains the form and feature of its lately living loveliness—more ruined than a shivered image, of which yet each fragment keeps still a sign of the shattered shape, a trace of the once matchless curves—his life's hope lay dust and ashes at his feet.

What was left to live for now?

Here on the wall hung the array of weapons picked from all quarters of the globe. Was it the thought that guided his hand to them? or the touch of the chilly steel that brought the thought to his mind? Here was the Malay's creese with the poisoned tip, the weapon that was always kept most carefully sheathed, that everyone who handled it touched with caution, and Mrs. Williams avoided with superstitious

dread. Was it really tipped with mortal poison? he wondered. It had been given to him with the story that it had been tested on a dog, and the dog had fallen dead. Was the poison fresh and mortal still?

How easy it would be to try the experiment!

Why not?

When a man thinks "Why not?" he has arrived at that stage when he is deaf to the answer.

Harold was not in any mood of passion or impulse; he had gone through the first paroxysms of despair; they were too sharp to last long. He was only dreaming—wondering. But from the seed of such dreams the action sometimes bursts suddenly into red-ripe fruit.

There was all darkness *here*; and in the Beyond there could be no worse than darkness, he thought, as he fingered the

sinuous edge and lightly touched the point.

There was a sound at the door; it was opened slowly and as if timidly; and, startled from the reverie in which he had been gliding nearer, nearer, to what brink he scarcely knew—he threw the weapon down and pushed it aside as he turned towards the door. He heard the soft sweep of a woman's dress, the light fall of a woman's foot. Instinctively he put up his hand as if to move the bandage from his eyes and *see* who the visitor was. Then he remembered—and his hand fell.

“Who is there?” he said, sharply.

“It is I, Harold,” a voice murmured very softly and tremulously—a voice at which he started.

“Speak again,” he said, with one quick step forward. “It is not—not *Athelyn*?”

“Yes, it *is* I.”

They drew nearer; and with no word of

greeting their hands met in a long close clasp.

“Harold, you are not angry with me for coming? I could not write, because—because——”

“Because I could not read?”

“Harold, are you better?”

“I am well—strong as ever—curses on my strength! You have heard it all?”

“Yes, I heard. Oh, Harold, is it true?”

“Yes. I’ve looked my last upon your face, Athelyn. Yet I am glad to hear your voice once more. It was like you to come.”

“Could you have dreamt that I should *not* come?”

Her voice is low and quivering. Her hands close on his in a convulsive trembling grasp; he hears her sobbing breath. The old magnetic force once more compels these two together. They know not which it is draws near the other first; but in another moment they are locked in a wild and

close embrace; she is clinging to him with tearless sobs of agony, while he, mute and still, with stern lips set, strains her to his heart in a silent passion that is less of love than of despair.

“Oh, my darling—my darling!” she moans, “is there no hope?”

“None—none!”

Her whole slight frame is trembling like a leaf in the wind; her arms are wreathed round him, close as a drowning woman would clasp and cling to a saving spar.

“Oh, God! that we cannot change fates with those we love!” she says, passionately. “Oh, my love, if I could have but taken this fate from you!”

Then with a sudden change of tone—a panther-like glitter in her eye—(for deep in the heart of every woman the pantheress sleeps, to wake at injury done to her love!) she adds,

“Who—*who* was it?”

“Is anyone here besides you?” he says, almost sharply, suspiciously, as if listening.

“No one. Why?”

“Because they have been asking me that.”

“And you—you cannot answer?”

“No, I can’t answer. I’ve no clue to give them.”

“Harold, I know you—you *will not* give the clue you have!”

“Cannot—or will not; what does it matter to the world?”

“But to me—to me?” she urges, impulsively.

“Enough of that,” he says, with resolution, just too fixed to be impatient, “there’s nothing to be said about it; what’s done is done.”

She knows she must urge no more.

Strangely the common-places of life come

in at such hours. One must push chairs, shut doors, poke fires mechanically, with tear-blind eyes and panting heart.

“You are cold and trembling, child,” he says, gently. “There’s a chair; sit down. Is the window open?”

Athelyn glances round the studio, remembers the one time that she had seen it before—a year ago, when he had fixed on her face the look they knew not was the last. She recollects all that day so well!

“What was it you had at that table when I came in?” she asks, and he hears her dress sweep towards that corner of the room.

“Don’t touch it, darling!” he calls, eagerly, and unconsciously falling back into the old familiar phrase, “the tip’s poisoned—or so they say,” he adds, cautiously, with feigned carelessness; “it may be true, or it mayn’t, but it’s as well to be careful.”

She does not answer at once, but he

knows the startled fear and trouble with which she is looking at the weapon and at him.

"I shall not leave it here," she says, suddenly, impulsively, with a deep anxiety and alarm but ill-disguised.

"Foolish child!" he answers, coolly, with a half scornful smile. "Do you think I couldn't find something else, if I wanted it? Have you put it down?"

"Yes."

She has sheathed it and put it far away from where he left it; she is somewhat reassured by the unforced coolness of his tone. She comes slowly back to his side and kneels down by him, and lays her hand on his, while, by some mesmeric consciousness, he knows her eyes are fixed upon his face. Moments pass, and still she kneels there dumbly, mute and still as marble. There is something rather soothing than

agitating about her presence—something stronger than the old charm in the touch of her hand to-day.

“What is it?” he asks at last, trying to read her silence.

“I am thinking,” she says, softly, with no trouble now in her voice.

“Thinking what, child? Think nothing that frets you,” he says, almost tenderly.

“I am not,” she replies; “it is only—only——” she hesitates, and then adds clearly and bravely, lifting her bent head, “Harold, let me come to you and stay with you, and never leave you more!”

“Have you just conceived some idea that I want taking care of—watching?”

“No,” she answers—“no; it is no fresh idea of a moment. It is what I came here to say.”

No passion nor eloquence could have added to the force of the last few simple

and quietly uttered words. He makes no answer, and she, after a brief pause, continues in the same calm concentrated tone,

“Harold, here is my life; it is yours—hands, heart, brain, eyes—all and only yours? Do you leave or take your own?”

He too pauses awhile before he answers,

“Athelyn, if when I had the world before me and could have worked for you—when I had my foot on the ladder and my own strength to fight my way upwards—if *then* I said, ‘My battle is not for you, too fair and pure and soft to share *my* life!’—do you think that *now* I could accept your sacrifice? Yet it’s sweet—it will be sweet hereafter—to think that, from first to last, you have been the true, pure angel I always deemed you—that even now, in your unselfish devotedness, you were willing to be my wife.”

A looker-on might think these two were

dealing coldly with the question. There is no passion nor agitation in the looks or tones of either; Athelyn is pale as iron at white heat—too highly wrought for flush or tremor now.

“Is there—any other woman?” she asks, earnestly.

“No woman on earth but you should be with me at this hour. I have felt that I could murder anyone who pitied me. But *you*—your sympathy bears no sting. I shall recollect to-day, darling, when you are only a memory to me.”

“Once I could bear to part from you,” she says, steadily—“it was pain, but not more pain than I could endure. But now I’ve reached the limits of my endurance. Harold, I *cannot* bear to leave you now!”

“You *must*,” he answers, quietly; “there is no question of *can* or *will*. I have barely enough for bread; my career is

ruined for ever, and for ever you and I are apart."

"But I—but *I!*" she rejoins. "Harold, don't you know my grandfather's dead? and I—it is but a little, but I think I have enough."

"The more for that we must keep apart," he answers, calmly and resolutely. "Don't you *see* that? you were never slow of perception. Your path is bright and prosperous now. Go your way. It was smooth and fair before I crossed it; and apart from me it will run smooth and fair to the end. At the end of all things, Athelyn, we may meet perhaps; but till then we tread our ways alone."

"Harold," she says, slowly, with the concentrated calmness of intense emotion, "do you send me from you?"

"I must, darling! I must not take advantage of your self-abnegation—your offer

of the sacrifice you can't now fully realise. Once I grudged your love to any other man—but I will not grudge it now. Let anyone win it who is most worthy of it. And come near *me* no more! Your voice is sweet to me—but I never wish to hear it again. Freely, utterly, I give you up!”

“Tell me God's truth,” she pleads, straining his hands in hers with quivering force, “you never deceived me—is it for *my* sake only?”

“For yours alone!”

“Then I will not *let* you give me up!” she exclaims, with a sudden burst of passionate confidence. “Again I tell you, Harold, I cannot and I will not part from you! and ‘for my sake’ you *shall not* give me up!”

“Athelyn, this is impulse, child! What if I took you at your word? Don't tempt me. God! when the day came that I saw you wished yourself free!”

His voice is shaken for the first time ; and Athelyn feels that in this struggle wherein "love itself takes part against itself" the battle is won by her. It is for her sake truly that he has striven to put her from him ; and though they may part this hour it will be but to meet again.

CHAPTER XVII.

“WHAT OF THE NIGHT?”

She can bring back the spring
To fields that seem forgotten of the light—
A star to bless my moon-deserted night!

P. B. MARSTON.

THE sun is going down; the last and reddest rays of daylight are shining over London. It is such a sunset as seems an anomaly behind the dusky roofs of a smoke-blurred city—a sunset that looks as if it should glow along the horizon of a great calm sea. All the west is one level fire of liquid ruby; not a cloud blots, not a ray of gold or purple varies it. There is only the

shadeless lake of ruby light along the horizon—the shadeless dome of flawless sapphire overhead—pure crimson and pure azure melting undefinably into each other by measureless gradations.

Harold and Athelyn are together again. She is leaning from the window looking on the sunset, with eyes that are sad because she sees it alone. His face is set towards the sunset too ; in him the passion of beauty has survived the power of perceiving it ; and to feel the sweet evening air breathe on his brow, while the glories of the evening light are shut from him, stings him to the soul with a pleasurable pain that is alike balm and wound.

“ ‘Evening red and morning grey!’ ” Athelyn’s soft voice sounds more deeply sweet than ever in his ear. “It will be fine to-morrow.”

“A good omen,” he says, but half ab-

stractedly, and lapses back into the silence more habitual to him than ever now, for awhile. No ray from that ruddy glory lights his darkness; but it is not that that he is brooding now. “Athelyn,” he says, presently, “there’s time yet. It is not too late for you to draw back. Who knows this plan of ours but ourselves and your mother? You are still free—in all ways absolutely free.”

“Yes,” she agrees, quietly, “what of that?”

“Have you thought well?” he urges. “Child, have you counted *well* the cost of being my wife?”

“I promised you,” she answers, “to think and to weigh with myself *all*. And my thoughts and my ponderings are over—as these doubts and questions of yours should be by now.”

The *words* sound reproachful, but there is

not a touch of anything but tenderness in the tone with which she utters them.

“Is it a wonder if I question still?” he responds. “I never was worthy of you, Athelyn; we both know that,”—the confession is made in no way humbly, rather abruptly and defiantly—“Yet, I shall be exacting and despotic and difficult to deal with; I shall demand from you more patience and forbearance than a man with more right to claim it would need. I shall take all and give nothing. I never had a large stock of amiability to start with—and now I’ve none. A broken man, with a spoilt temper, shattered spirits, a lost future, ruined prospects—do you realise that this is what I am? I was trying to you in the old days; I tested your patience sorely sometimes, I know. And now I fear that I shall put your love to still severer trials. Is it strong enough to stand the ordeal of

daily life with me with all my faults?”

“Try me!” she murmurs, nestling to his side. “If in the old days I never wavered—never from first to last have for one moment loved you less—can you doubt me *now*? You talk of your faults. What if your faults are dearer to me than other men’s virtues? What even if they don’t seem faults to me? What am *I* but a faulty mortal woman? Harold, never breathe mistrust of my love again! It is all that there is of best and strongest in me. And henceforth, you know, I sink my very life in yours. I keep back no atom—no one moment of my existence. It is not mine any longer—I give it all to you. Shall not the king do what he pleases with his own?”

Her face was as an angel’s then, as the last rosy rays of sunset lingered tenderly on its loveliness. Silently she watched the dying day, her lover’s arms locked round her, his

weary head at rest on her true heart.

"I thought that all but bitterness was dead in me," he said at last, "I thought there was no love left in my heart. But I love you, Athelyn!"

"You love me, Harold?" she breathes softly, and with a slow deep sigh. "God has been good to me!"

"Was it love before, in the dear old days?" he mused. "Yes, always, always, I think, my Athelyn. But then you would only have been my wife, my love. Now—now—what are you not? You will be life and soul, and earth and heaven to me!"

The dusky shades steal over the west; the red glow dies out; but they do not miss its light. Is "Evening red and Morning grey" the forecast of their future?

The story of the four lives that made and marred each other is told, though on only

one the seal that closes the volume to eternity is set. One has passed beyond our ken, and reached her rest. For the other three, the threads of their lives are running still, though it seems unlikely that they will ever meet and tangle again.

Paul Severne seeks his ideal no more, but is knight-errant still. If you want to find him, look in the ranks of the losing cause.

The mystery of the crime that shut the daylight for ever out of Harold Parkhurst's life, and blasted his career in the day of its brightest promise, has never been solved, nor ever will be. Even Athelyn never attempts to intrude upon the secret he will bear with him unspoken to the grave.

The world, that never knew nor understood much of Harold and Athelyn, knows less and understands less now. It wonders of course that Athelyn “threw herself away;” it

would be kindly willing to lavish its sympathy on Harold, if he would accept it, and rather resents the resolution with which he holds aloof. But even the world does not deny his devotion to his fair young wife.

Now that she is all that is left to him of happiness, now that her watchful tenderness is necessary to his daily peace, now at last the day has come when her love is dearer than life to him.

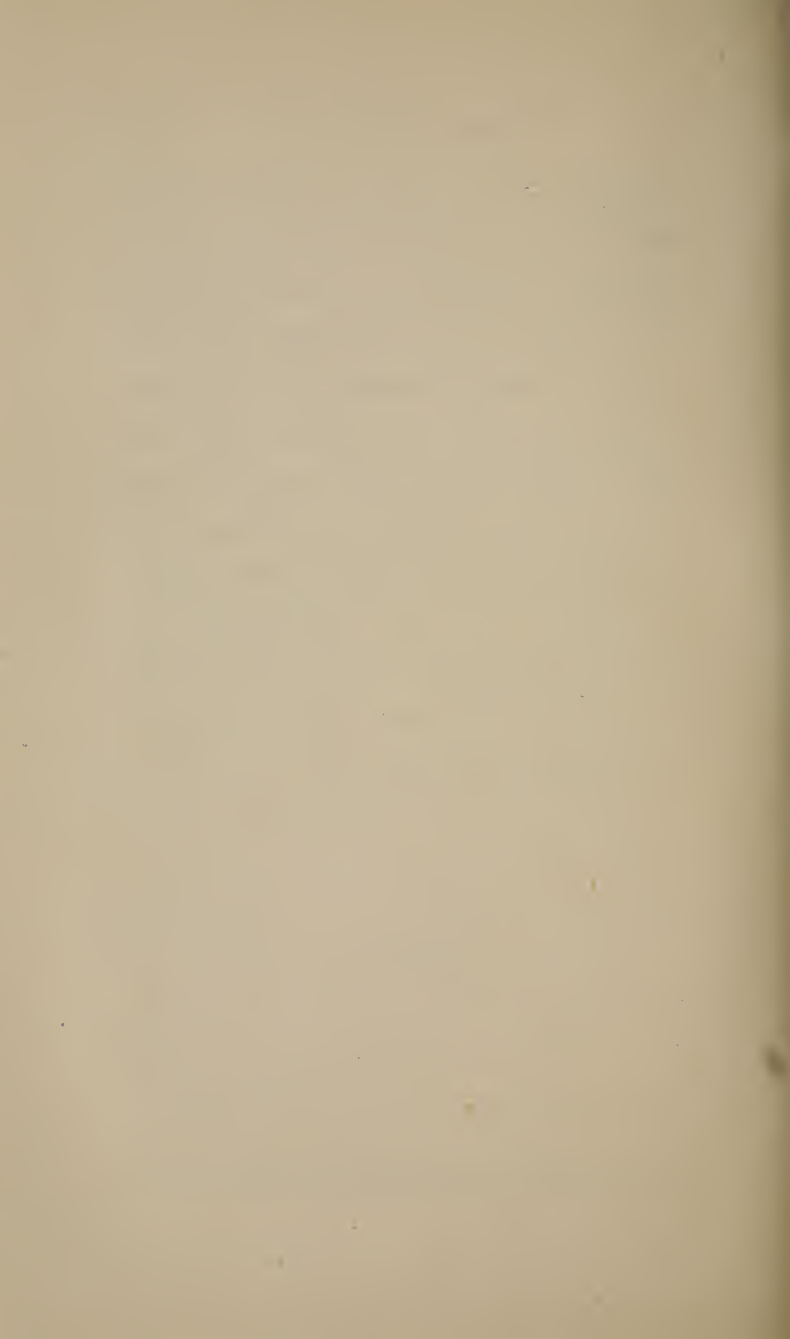
He seeks with jealous care that the very "winds of heaven shall not visit her face too roughly." He cannot bear her absence for a day; he guards and cherishes her with an eager anxiety, as if she were a jewel that the Fates were on the watch to steal from him—a flower that a breath would slay.

And she? I quote her own words from a letter to her true friend.

"Dear Paul, you ask me whether I am happy? If to be happy is to feel you would

not change your place on earth for Heaven itself, were the choice offered you, then I am happy! And yet that is not the word! I was happy in my thoughtless unclouded morning. Then Life was like a June day of blooming roses and burning sun, and song of birds filling all the blue sky. And now? Do you know those still summer starlight nights, when there seems a song in the silence, when Life seems Love, and earth so close to Heaven you could whisper through? now I am not merely ‘happy’—I am supremely blest!”

THE END.



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